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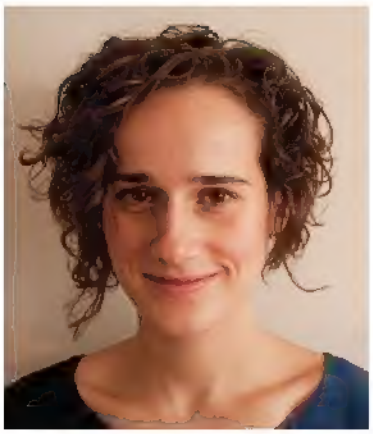

Julia Cooke
In *Pretty Hurts*, Cooke explores new shows that bend conventional rules of prime time with angry and beautiful female leads. She wrote *The Other Side of Paradise*, a non-fiction portrait of Cuba, and her byline has appeared in The *New York Times* and *Virginia Quarterly Review*, where she's a contributing editor.

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A one-time Silicon Valley software engineer, Chen now lives in the American Pacific Northwest, where he writes full-time and runs a social gaming event called Puzzled Pint. Author of the novel *Waypoint Kangaroo*, about a superpowered secret agent in space, and its sequel, *Kangaroo Too*, Chen penned this issue's original short story *Go, Space Racer!*

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Sean Manning
A freelance writer and Senior Editor at Simon & Schuster, Manning is currently working on books about Bruce Lee, the movies of 1999 and Chicago gun violence. The US, Akron, Ohio native covered a Uruguayan horse race for Playboy in 2014 and returns to the fold for this issue's *Playboy Interview* with actor-director John Krasinski.

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ON THE COVER *Jenna Bentley, photography by Arthur St John*

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THE FUTURE OF THE DEMOCRATS

A lesson from Alabama: If the Democratic Party wants to dominate the mid-terms, it will need a serious attitude adjustment

By JW HOLLAND

The The US mid-term election cycle is often a slam dunk for the minority party, but at press time the Dem crats hadn't even settled on a strategy If they want to see victories in 2018, here's a suggestion. Stop expecting to lose and start playing to win.

Consider Alabama's special election last December. Doug Jones's upset victory over Republican Roy Moore proved that even in traditionally conservative strongholds, the fate of the Democratic Party is not predestined. Of course, had the Republican been anyone but an extremist facing a sexual-assault scandal, Jones might not have prevailed. From early in the race, local pundits sensed that a Democrat could do well, but it's unlikely the Democratic National Committee or other progressives would have put the same resources into defeating a more moderate Republican.

Waiting on the GOP to nominate more abhorrent candidates isn't a winning strategy for the DNC in 2018, though Democrats will have plenty of opportunities to use that tactic Republicans continue to present plausible targets in conservative states. In Texas, Representative Beto O'Rourke is mounting a grassroots Senate campaign to defeat right-wing theocrat Ted Cruz. In Arizona, Democrats are eyeing the seat opened by retiring Senator Jeff Flake. Their candidate could potentially face either ex Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who was recently pardoned by President Trump, wiping away his criminal contempt-of-court conviction, or Kelli Ward, a former state senator and one-time Bannon Republican who drew backlash from her own party for calling on Senator John McCain to resign after his cancer diagnosis. Arizona is also the battleground to replace Representative Trent Franks, a Pat Buchanan–style Republican who resigned in December amid sexual-harassment claims; his seat may not be as safe for the GOP as anticipated.

"It isn't until you have a race with a weak Republican candidate and a strong Democratic candidate that the DNC throws any substantial amount of money and support behind their own," says Cole Manders, a former insider and one-time rising star of the Alabama GOP Liberals need to shift their mindset if they intend to win over new voters, he says. "Elections, victories and majorities are investments, not lotteries."

Democrats might be wise to take a cue from the GOP, which funds local-level races nationwide — races the Democratic Party seems inclined to ignore. During the Obama presidency, right-leaning organisations including the American Legislative Exchange Council and Americans for Prosperity poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the campaigns of regional candidates. The efforts paid big dividends. By the time Obama left office, the Republican Party had successfully taken more than 900 state-level seats across the country. That success put redistricting in the hands of GOP-controlled state legislatures. Through gerrymandering, the threshold for Democrats to win congressional elections became much harder to cross. It also gave Republicans a bullpen of recognisable candidates for federal elections.

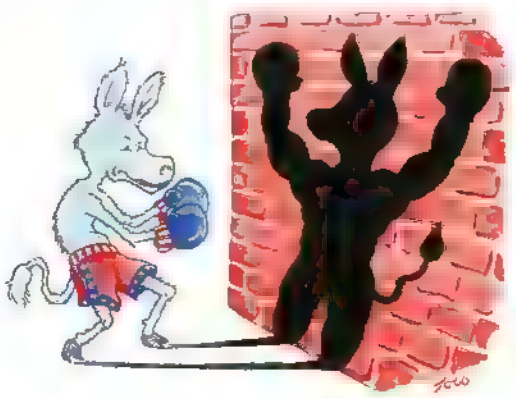
"It was somewhat discouraging for us as young Democrats," says Miranda Joseph, a Democratic strategist in Alabama and two-time nominee for state office. "We lost a lot of good leaders." Alabama's state Democratic Party, it seemed, had been practically left for dead. Much of the ground game and support for Jones came from national organisations and progressives from other areas, making up for the lack of Democratic infrastructure in the state.

But Joseph points to improvements over the past year. "There are so many more small, successful groups now doing much more effective work than the state party is able to do as one large group," she says.

As Jones's victory proves, red seats can be flipped to blue. This mid-term season, Democrats need to connect with moderate and independent-minded Republicans who don't identify with either the GOP's establishment faction or its alt-right-aligned branch. They must advance into the consistently deep red patches on the map and commit enough resources to win at the state and local levels. And they must show potential new voters that the party is fielding candidates who could be their neighbours and friends, not the so-called liberal elites who hold drastically different values

"I suspect the DNC may start investing in races that previously seemed out of reach," says Hiral Tipirneni, a Democrat campaigning to replace Representative Franks. "I've seen that Arizona Democrats are experiencing a new energy and enthusiasm, particularly at the local level, since Trump's election."

Democrats will need to channel that enthusiasm along with funding to earn victories in red districts. For Democrats, the concerns of average American voters will be another key to winning in 2018; a back-to-basics message will likely resonate even in the reddest of polling sites. According to recent Gallup polling, Americans are most concerned with health care,



race relations, immigration and the economy — but the biggest concern is dysfunctional, ineffective government. "I think Democrats nationally are standing in stark contrast to the corporate, ultra-wealthy priorities being promoted by the GOP in DC," Tipirneni says.

One more suggestion for Dems: Don't allow the focus of the mid-terms to be President Trump That will be crucial for individual Democratic races, where candidates must fight on their own terms and not get baited into rhetorical, fear-based brawls. The future of the Democratic Party rests on whether its current incarnation can shut the door on past failures. To win, Democrats must first realise they can. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY **TOM TORO**

SIGNIFICA, INSIGNIFICA, STATS AND FACTS

DRAWN DATA

EASY BEING GREEN

1962

first year the Chicago River was dyed green for St. Patrick's Day

25 POUNDS: amount of dye used to color the water today

45 MINUTES: time it takes to distribute the dye (which is orange) by motorboat

5 HOURS: duration of the river's bright green hue

Oscar at 90

MARCH 4, 2018: 90th anniversary of the Academy Awards

3,048: number of Oscar statuettes presented since the ceremony debuted in 1929

$629: reported value of the 24-karat-gold-plated bronze statue

8.5 POUNDS: statue's weight

3 MONTHS: time required to manufacture 50 Oscars

LUCKY CHARMS

111,060: number of four-leaf clovers in the current Guinness world-record holder's collection

8 YEARS: time it took said record holder to amass his collection

1 IN 10,000: odds of finding a four-leaf clover, according to horticulture professor John Frett

GOOD CHILE HUNTING

501,000: number of Easter eggs in the largest hunt on record—collected by **9,753** children at the Cypress Gardens Adventure Park in Winter Haven, Florida in 2007

RABBIT *Records*

300: most rabbits ever pulled out of a magician's hat

4 FEET, 2 INCHES: length of Darius, the world's longest rabbit

9,360 POUNDS: weight of the world's largest chocolate bunny

GOLD DIGGERS

261,498,926.241: fine troy ounces of gold in the U.S. government's reserve as of October 2017

$11,041,059,957.90: the gold's reported book value

TWITTER *Lickin'* GOOD!

1.3 MILLION: number of followers of KFC's Twitter account

11: number of accounts followed by KFC (five Spice Girls and six men named Herb—think about it)

Quadruple RAINBOOOOW!

4: most rainbows ever caught together on camera

12: number of known rainbow varieties

SPRING BREAKERS

1938: year spring break took hold in the U.S.

1953: first official spring break in Fort Lauderdale

1960: year MGM released the break-sploitation film *Where the Boys Are*

50,000: coeds who spent spring break in Fort Lauderdale within a year of the film's release

1975: first commercial wet T-shirt contest

[redacted]

1986: debut broadcast of MTV's *Spring Break*

$1.8 BILLION: estimated amount spent by **2017** spring breakers

FAKE FOOLS

[redacted]

2004: launch of Gmail

2014: reopening of Action Park, New Jersey's most dangerous water park

EXTRA!

APRIL FOOLS' HOAXES

MISTAKEN FOR NEWS ITEMS

1931 [illegible]

2017: a report on the YouTube channel UFOmaps of an event at [illegible] in the Great Smoky Mountains

Apocalypse How?

British cop drama ***Hard Sun*** *leads a wave of new takes on the end of the world. Spoiler alert: It's not as bad as it seems*

By **STEVE PALOPOLI**

Since ancient times, humans have lusted for the ability to see the future. Our oracles and prophets, and even some of our modern-day psychics and star-gazers, are commonly characterised as gifted, blessed, touched by a greater power

But what if knowing the future turned out to really, *really* suck?

Certainly the idea that such seers might have a steep price to pay stretches across world cultures, from Cassandra of Greek myth to Fiver in *Watership Down*. But the new "pre-apocalyptic" drama *Hard Sun*, a BBC series debuting stateside on Hulu, puts a modern spin on the clairvoyance curse that's as shiny and high-tech as it is archetypal. Two police detectives, Elaine Renko and Charlie Hicks, are investigating the death of a hacker when they come into possession of a flash drive at the centre of the case. As bodies pile up around them, they realise what's on the drive: incontrovertible evidence that the world is going to end in five years, the planet engulfed in an unstoppable cosmic event. Suddenly they have a choice to make. Do they give in to the shadowy government forces that, fearing global chaos, want to keep the information from getting out at all costs? Or do they tell the world, even though there's nothing anyone can do to alter their fiery fate? Already constantly at odds with each other and now forced into an impossible situation, they face galactically steep odds. And yet the man who created these characters, showrunner Neil Cross, doesn't feel bad for them at all. Hell, Renko and Hicks have it easy; Cross has to write this story — his third television series after the similarly dark BBC drama *Luther* and NBC's *Crossbones* — and keep these characters motivated in the face of extinction. How does he approach it? "With fear and trepidation every morning," says Cross. "I go to my computer frightened and feeling that the task ahead of me is insurmountable. But that's what makes me work hard."

Besides, isn't what *Hard Sun's* main characters are facing just an extreme metaphor

for what the rest of us go through every day?

"The truth is that we all have our personal Armageddon heading for us like a train through time," says Cross. "We're all going to die. We don't know when — it could be in 15 minutes, it could be next Tuesday, it could be in 25 years. So the dilemma that Renko and Hicks deal with, which is finding meaning and worth and value in the face of ultimate destruction, in fact is a choice we all make every morning."

Maybe that's why apocalyptic stories never go out of style. Far from making us worry about the real end of the world, the best of them make us feel as though there's no zombie takeover too ravenous, no denuded landscape too desolate, no flamethrowing-guitar battalion of War Boys too savage to snuff out the human will to live.

"Survival is given such value in that context — that's the thing," says Cross. "Life is something to fight for. I think all apocalyptic dramas essentially are reassuring. They're not really about destruction."

"People love to look at the apocalypse," says Kate Harwood, executive producer of *Hard Sun*, "in the way that we love to look at death — because we think we're always going to dodge it. And in some ways it makes you feel very alive, doesn't it? I mean, if you know everybody's going to die, you think, But it's a fiction. I'm alive! Let's celebrate that! Let's live for today."

If the addition of the apocalypse to the police-procedural genre makes *Hard Sun* an offbeat offering, it's not alone; this year will see a number of innovative takes on the eschatological epic.

One of the strangest post-apocalyptic movies in recent memory, 2013's *Snowpiercer*, is getting a television series on TNT that, according to star Daveed Diggs, will delve further into the culture and politics of the train that carries the last surviving humans on a non-stop route around the earth after the arrival of a man-made Ice Age.

Robert Kirkman, creator of the original comic incarnation of *The Walking Dead*, is debuting a new title called *Oblivion Song*. It's set 10 years after a gigantic landmass from an alternate dimension has suddenly materialised in an American city. With a legion of monsters wiping out tens of thousands of people and a wall finally being constructed to protect survivors (in case you were starting to worry these stories were devoid of direct parallels to our current political climate), Kirkman and collaborator Lorenzo De Felici ask: How does humanity recover from a catastrophic event it cannot even comprehend?

Opposite page and above: Jim Sturgess and Agyness Deyn play *Hard Sun*'s haunted detectives

Wildest of all might be the Peter Jackson–produced *Mortal Engines*, coming later this year. Set thousands of years after the apocalypse, the film presents a future in which a motorised London-on-wheels rolls through the barren continents, devouring smaller mobile burgs like an obese house cat hunting field mice.

These are probably not visions of the future you'd want to foresee. Certainly the stars of *Hard Sun* struggle with that dilemma. If the world is indeed ending in five years, wouldn't they be better off not knowing?

Jim Sturgess, who plays Hicks, says he imagines that knowledge would give every element of life, every tiny detail, a heightened importance.

"Everything matters, everything has a point and a reason. There's a beauty in that, in a weird way," he says. "I would be disappointed if I missed that — if it just hit me and I wasn't prepared for it. You can really see the beauty of the world we live in when you know it's all going to disappear."

Agyness Deyn, who plays Renko, can even imagine a certain acceptance: "I try to live with no regrets. I would just want to be around nature and family and friends. I think I'd be okay with it, when it came to it, if everyone's going."

And really, isn't all this end-of-the-world hand-wringing just a lot of human vanity anyway? Does our refusal to ever say die even matter, given that the universe existed long before mankind and will continue long after? Cross thought the same thing, until he had a conversation with Brian Cox — Scientific Advisor on *Hard Sun* and a physicist who has emerged as a sort of British Neil deGrasse Tyson.

"Brian said he's aware of a theory that, despite the vastness of space, the number of coincidences necessary in order for complex life to evolve on Earth are so extraordinary that even given the scale of the universe, it might have happened only once, and it might have happened only here," says Cross. "If that's the case, we are where meaning is. Meaning in the universe is with us, and if we're gone, all meaning disappears."

So whether or not a molten comet is hurtling toward us, whether or not we can ever learn our species' expiration date, you might consider investing a little extra energy into making each day count. No pressure. ■

PRETTY HURTS

...en rule. A female character may be beautiful or ungl... ...ew shows prove that rul... ...to be broken.

JULIA COOKE

Shapely limbs swollen and wavering under water, lipstick wiped off a pale mouth with a yellow sponge, blonde bangs caught in the zipper of a body bag: Kristy Guevara-Flanagan's 2016 short film *What Happened to Her* collects images of dead women in a 15-minute montage culled mostly from crime-based television dramas. Throughout, men stand murmuring over beautiful young white corpses. "You ever see something like this?" a voice drawls.

Conventional female beauty on crime shows has usually been treated more or less like this—even when a woman doesn't end up dead, she's a plot point that serves a man with a motivation. But these days, a lot of beautiful women on television are getting angry instead of getting killed. Anger is no longer an exclusively male emotion or a flaw for a female character to overcome before finding her happy ending with a handsome man. Several recent series are proving that a woman's anger can be her own plot point, a source of strength, a galvanising force. Shows starring angry heroines range from arty to commercial, realistic to fantastical, and they're set in the past, present and future. And they're garnering ratings, reviews and awards — *HBO's Big Little Lies* and Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* took every major drama trophy offered at last year's Emmys except best lead and supporting actor. Add in Amazon's *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel*, starring another angry woman, and the three shows dominated the Golden Globes too. The list goes on: *Alias Grace, Jessica Jones, Insecure, Top of the Lake, The Crown*.

Historically speaking, women on-screen chose between anger and conventional physical beauty, and anger made beautiful women crazy. Consider the snappy Carla from *Cheers* or the intimidating Dr Miranda Bailey on early *Grey's Anatomy*, as opposed to the statuesque women of *Melrose Place*, acting on their fury in lusciously insane ways. Columbia University film professor Hilary Brougher points out that *MASH's* Major Margaret Houlihan became "pretty" within the show only in later seasons, when her anger was no longer a plot point.

"We're beginning to see angry women in a range of modalities — angry TV heroines can be strategic, passive-aggressive, revolutionary or compassionate," says Brougher. "And while they may have male allies, they're no longer dependent on men to be effective."

These days, injustice — often linked to the tangled ramifications of a heroine's beauty — gives women licence to take all sorts of juicy actions that are far more interesting than killing. On Marvel's *Jessica Jones*, it's fury at being raped and manipulated by the evil Kilgrave that spurs the protagonist to become the righteously bitchy superhero she's meant to be. When her husband dumps her for his secretary, Midge Maisel on *The Marvelous Mrs Maisel* — a woman who spent four years waking up before her husband to put her face on — funnels her rage into a coarse and hilarious act as she pursues a career in stand-up comedy, a double no-no for a 1950s mother of two. On the Netflix/Canadian Broadcasting Corporation series *Alias Grace*, the titular character may or may not have helped kill her male employer, but the show's true pull is how the 19th-century domestic servant twists and revises tales of daily abasement and violence for the psychiatrist who hopes to understand and possibly exonerate her. We see the anger shimmering beneath her placid expression, her milky skin and blue eyes. If she did commit the crime, would we blame her?

"I didn't think of anger as a motivating force, probably because I think women are always angry women," says *Alias Grace* director Mary Harron, whose previous films include *American Psycho* and *I Shot Andy Warhol*. "It's a normal response to circumstances."

It's that very normalcy that makes the current surge of angry women on television so remarkable. Even when anger is not the point of a plot or a character's central trait, even when realism is cut by fantasy, on-screen women face situations that the average female viewer will recognise immediately. On *Insecure* high-powered attorney Molly discovers that her white male colleague makes a whole lot more money than she does. *Big Little Lies*, last year's most visible conflagration of entirely normal female anger, cuts between the competitive moms of Monterey, California. Reese Witherspoon's Madeline seems to live in a highlighter-bright shimmer of barbed quips lit by her frustration and uncertainty. Laura Dern's fierce Renata Klein, the doyenne of the working moms, throws her phone into the pool when cracks appear in her finely cultivated all-ness. Shailene Woodley's Jane runs hard and fast, flashing back to scenes of her rape and packing a gun in her purse to meet with a man who might be the perpetrator. Their anger is nuanced, caused by a range of situations, and on-screen they struggle to tame it into something else: self-defence, loyalty, grudges, power, career.

The shift in representation aligns with the increasing number of women behind cameras in Hollywood. Harron points out that the executives who greenlit *Alias Grace* at both Netflix and the CBC were women. Witherspoon, Dern and co-star Nicole Kidman all recently launched production companies. Last year marked the first time three women were nominated for a best director Emmy — one of whom, Reed Morano, won for *The Handmaid's Tale*.

And if these shows conjured a zeitgeist throughout 2017, now, in the post-Harvey Weinstein moment, they look not only cathartic but prophetic. Anger, when expressed by such a range of female characters, amplifies the point that reacting to injustice doesn't make a woman crazy, no matter what she looks like. On-screen, as in life, anger is a powerful energy that can begin the change by which one moves through the world as agent rather than victim.

Their lessons spiral outside the TV universe in strange and interesting ways. The second season of *Jessica Jones* will be helmed exclusively by female directors, and women—black women — black women in particular — have reported negotiating pay raises after watching Molly do so on *Insecure*. The cycle continues: women in positions of power putting complex female characters on-screen, encouraging more women to claim more power.

The lesson, pertinent to men and women, is that the way toward change is through and not over anger. But there's more to it than that.

"The thing about angry women is they're just talking about it," says Harron of the current moment in Hollywood. "Are they talking about it in extraordinary ways? No. They're just talking about it. 'This is what was done to me.' People think, Oh, it's women with pitchforks. No, they're just saying, 'This happened.' "

Sometimes what's labelled as anger, when it comes from the fairer sex, isn't anger at all; it's just women asking to be heard, asking to narrate their own stories, to shift *What Happened to Her* to "what happened to me." ■

"The thing about angry women is they're just talking about it: This is what was done to me.' "

PHOTO COLLAGE BY **GLUEKIT**

Rita
ROSALINE

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Born and raised in sunny Southern California, Rita currently lives in Los Angeles. Her exotic and striking features long legs and curves turn heads. Modelling has allowed her to travel the world and work in cities such as Tokyo and Paris. She is a graduate of UCLA with a bachelor's of science in biology Rita is passionate about her career in nursing and medicine.

Her love of children has sent her on medical rescue missions to other countries to care for children who lack medical attention. She partakes in research projects for advancing medical care with children in third world countries.

Rita aspires to travel and explore all parts of the world. She hopes to go to Italy this summer. "I love meeting people from different parts of the world and hearing their stories." She loves her Armenian heritage and speaks Arabic and Armenian fluently. She is fascinated by different cultures, religions and places. Rita loves to work out and stays healthy and fit with hikes and Pilates. Many are surprised to hear that her hobbies include cooking and baking for her family and friends. She loves going to live boxing matches and football games.

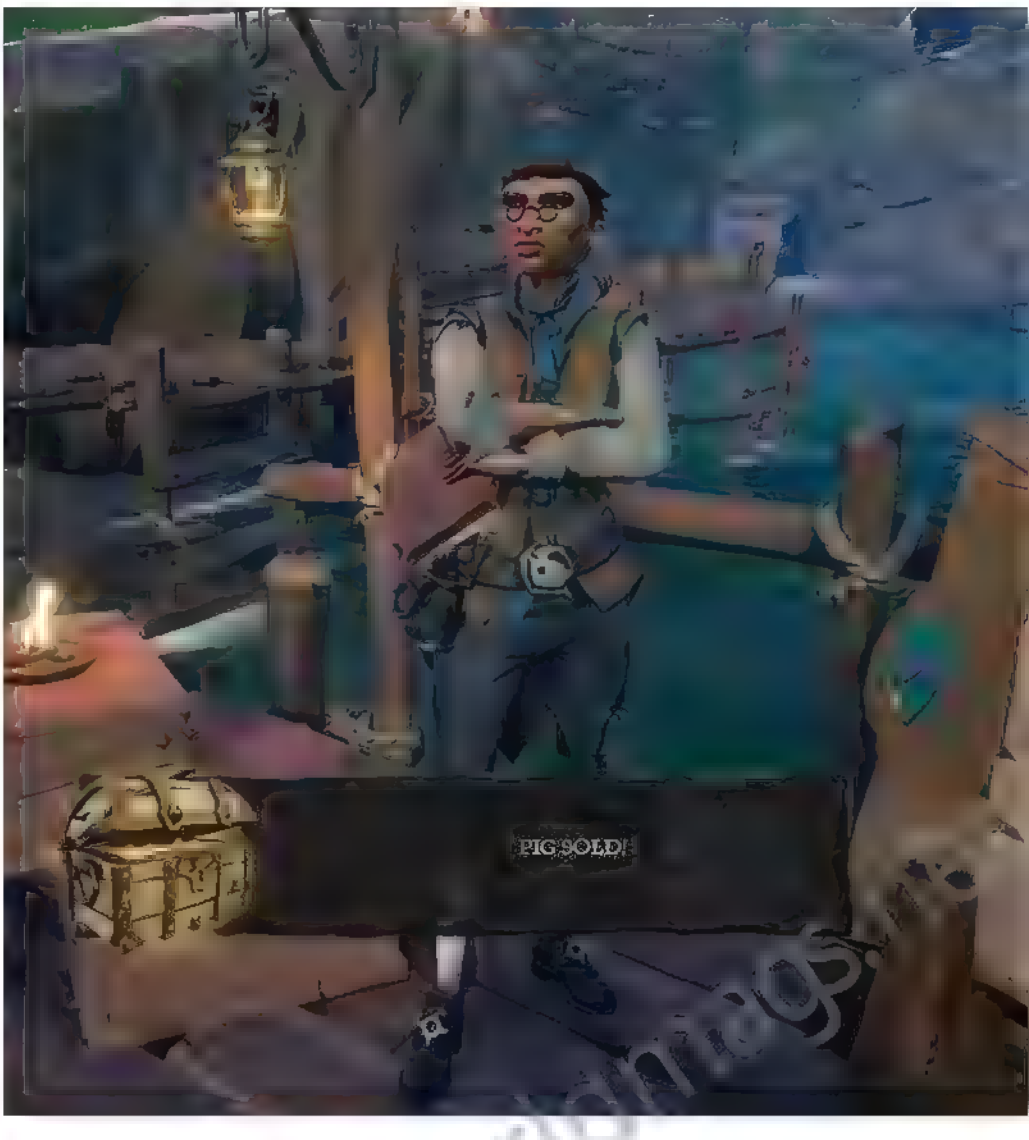
ADVENTURES A'HOY!

From pirates to gods to cars, we're delivering on all your gaming fantasies.

BY **ANDRE COETZER**

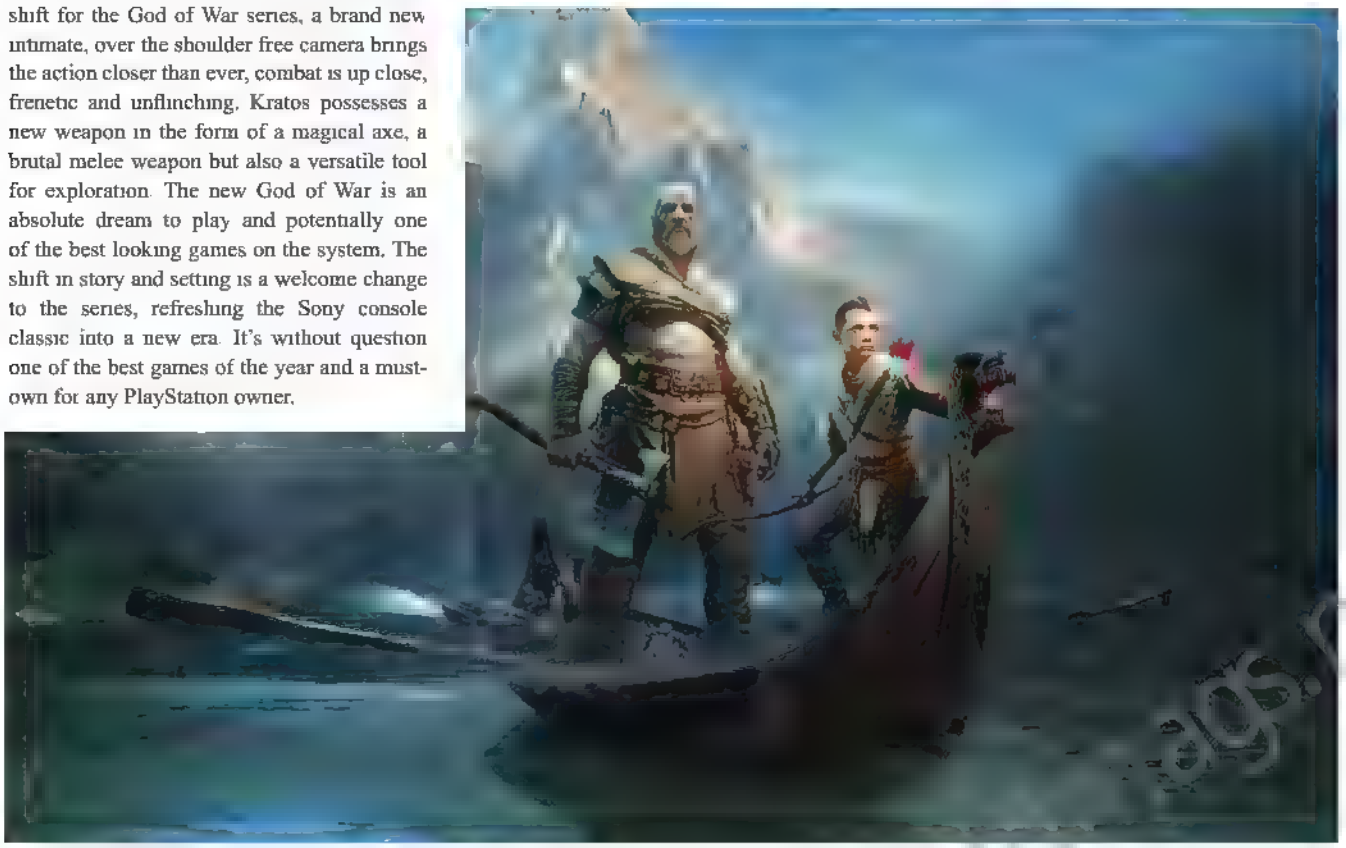
SEA OF THIEVES

It's been a while since Microsoft released a first party exclusive for its consoles and PC, so naturally the excitement went through the roof when it was announced that legendary game developers Rare would be releasing a brand new IP for the Microsoft systems. Sea of Thieves is a new type of multiplayer game that delivers all you need to live the life of a pirate. Whether adventuring as a group of salty sea dogs or sailing the beautiful oceans solo, the massive open world allows you and your friends to live out every pirate fantasy imaginable. There are countless ways to make your mark in Sea of Thieves, the more voyages and adventures you undertake, the greater your reputation becomes and the more opportunities unfold before you. You and your sea shanty singing crew can approach the world and its wealth of challenges however you choose. Sail for the sheer joy of discovery or undertake dramatic voyages, following maps and untangling riddles, all while encountering other player pirates, who might be friendly or will try to sink your ship and loot your gold. Sea of Thieves is incredibly fun when you have your friends play along, but it might be a tad daunting if going in solo, so it's highly recommended as a multiplayer adventure but less so as a solo experience. Although the world might be massive, loaded with opportunities for loads of pirate fun, the game does feel a bit samey after a while, however Rare has promised to constantly update the game and give the players the adventure they crave. If you love multiplayer games and own an Xbox or PC then Sea of Thieves is must have



GOD OF WAR

Since the PlayStation 2 days, God of War has been a powerhouse of action-adventure gaming on the Sony console, featuring head-turning graphics combined with brutal god killing action. And now in 2018 God of War returns to the PlayStation 4, but this is not your granddaddy's God of War. A lot has changed for hero Kratos and it's an incredibly welcome change. The original God of War was set in Greek mythology, with hero Kratos battling it out with Zeus and the other gods of Olympus. Now older and wiser our hero returns to find himself in the world of Norse mythology. But that's not the only change, Kratos is a father now and his son Atreus will do anything to please his rage-filled father. As mentor and protector to a son determined to earn his respect, Kratos is faced with an unexpected opportunity to master the rage that has long defined him. It's a personal journey of a man trying to do what is right for his son. Set within the untamed forests, mountains and realms of Norse lore, be prepared to face brand new types of creatures, monsters and gods, all determined to put an end to the father and son. But the story is not the only massive shift for the God of War series, a brand new intimate, over the shoulder free camera brings the action closer than ever, combat is up close, frenetic and unflinching. Kratos possesses a new weapon in the form of a magical axe, a brutal melee weapon but also a versatile tool for exploration. The new God of War is an absolute dream to play and potentially one of the best looking games on the system. The shift in story and setting is a welcome change to the series, refreshing the Sony console classic into a new era. It's without question one of the best games of the year and a must-own for any PlayStation owner.



BURNOUT PARADISE REMASTERED

Known for its incredible speeds and jaw dropping-crashes, Burnout Paradise received universal praise when it was originally released on the PS3 and Xbox 360. Now many years later, it sees its re-release on current-gen consoles with updated graphics in glorious 4K resolution and a solid 60 frames per second, plus all the additional DLC that was released post-launch. Set in the massive open world of Paradise City, players get to choose where and when they race their supercharged vehicles. From the busy city streets to the winding roads of the mountainous outskirts, Paradise City is filled to the brim with racing goodness. Unlike other racing games, the races are scattered all other the map allowing you to pick and choose which race you want to do and when. From pulling up next to a rival racer at a red robot or hunting down a rare supped up car along the busy streets, the variety in race types is phenomenal. Of course what would a Burnout game be without its spectacular crashes? In other games one avoids crashing at all costs, yet in Paradise it is encouraged. It's a visual spectacle as you slam into a rival car at 300km/h, with the action slowing down to show you every metal crunch and car parts flying all over the track. Burnout Paradise is a fantastic remaster and holds up to today's high standards. It's a high adrenaline, white-knuckle racer that puts most current games to shame

DISSECTING THE ALL-NEW BMW G310GS

BRETT SWAIN

BMW Motorrad has finally revealed the G310GS One could hardly dream up anything more beautiful than the idea of exploring the outdoors astride such a nimble motorcycle, all while enjoying the seductive grumblings of its exhaust.

Before I walk you through my personal experience from the saddle of this BMW unicorn, let us first get the technical specifications out of the way. I refer to this motorcycle as a unicorn, as it is the first time BMW has manufactured an engine below 500cc on a production bike. The exact reasons for this departure are no secret, BMW is looking to broaden its footprint into other markets and to be visible in all motorcycling areas by 2020.

The medium to small cc adventure bike market is highly competitive, and BMW has its hands full trying to rival the likes of the Suzuki V-Strom 250, the Kawasaki Versys, Yamaha and even the KTM 390. It is a very interesting segment of the market that is sometimes overlooked, but in terms of form and function, we should definitely pay more attention to the rumblings coming from the small adventure bikes

This will be the first BMW motorcycle that will not be manufactured in Europe, but rather built and assembled in India It should not come as news to anyone that Asia's large population makes commuting by motorcycle efficacious, so on face value, the business model seems sound.

The G310GS produces 25kW which is sufficient to project it to a top speed of 145km/h, courtesy of a single cylinder, four valve, 313cc backward tilted engine. This engine position aids in achieving near perfect front to back balance. The G310GS comes standard with ABS, which can be deactivated when one wants to enjoy some off-road "controlled" hooliganism, remember, this is not a 1200GS

In terms or wheels the bike is perched atop a 19-inch front wheel, which is bigger than its G310R sibling and the rear being managed by a standard 17-inch rim.

The G310GS also has 18 centimetres of suspension travel, which is roughly 4 centimetres more travel than its tar restricted counterpart the G310R. This was a statistic that concerned me a little as I anticipated that the GS would behave like a seal on land and ebb and flow under hard braking. But this was pleasantly not the case, it was more of a faithful and obedient service Labrador that lead me through the bends smoothly making the suspension travel a non-issue.

The G310GS was just as reassuring when taken off-road, although it must be said that it is not a 1200GS with an off-road pedigree. The G310GS is geared more predominately for commuting on tarmac, with the occasional departure to a country road. Despite this manufacturer recommendation, the G310GS as very much at home in the dirt.

So, let's get down to brass tacks. I am a man that stands 1.9m (6ft3) and tips the scales at 115kg, so I generally gravitate towards motorbikes with larger engine capacities. My initial expectation would be that this bike would feel burdened with me on it, but with its weight of only 165kgs wet and 25kW, it was more than up to the task. The more than generous midrange power meant that I could almost always leave the corner in the same gear I entered it with. The front end was also nicely planted through the corners. I never got the feeling that the front end wanted to wash away Also, a very nice addition for the vertically challenged person, is that the bike does have three seat height settings to combat tip toeing at the lights, it was very thoughtful of BMW to try and spare mere mortals this embarrassment (tongue-in-cheek.)

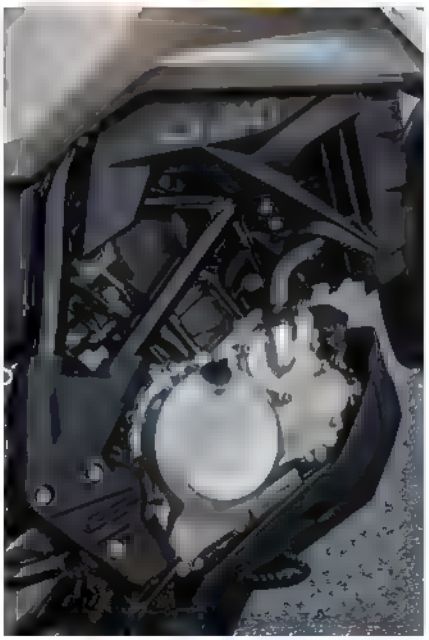
City riding was a breeze and I manoeuvred about with confidence and efficacy with the engine sipping fuel at only 3.3L per 100km which is extremely economical.

This G310GS is a well-constructed piece and it's very well priced with BMW not compromising on the quality of materials. As usual though, BMW will offer a full set of accessories and optional extras for the bike. But in standard guise, it does not leave you wanting Maybe the addition of a top box on the standard issue framework will turn this bike into the perfect commuter or country road cruiser

Purchase confidence and potential buyer's remorse is mitigated through a two-year full factory warranty, this will be a handy bargaining chip in terms of limiting additional service costs when you surprise your partner with yet another bike

In terms of cosmetic appeal these bikes will turns heads, in fact, at a quick glance it would easily be mistaken for its much bigger brother the 1200GS, but the ruse will not last under scrutiny

All in all, we welcome BMW's entry into this segment of the market and we think this iteration of the GS will be successful



IMAGES COURTESY OF BMW

STEVEN PINKER

This man is on a mission to convince you that, despite how bad it looks, civilisation is working. Who knew optimism could be such a hard sell?

Photography by
JOSHUA ALLEN HARRIS

By **AMANDA PETRUSICH**

What if all our kvetching about the sheer misery of life on Earth is, in fact, self-perpetuating hooey? What if humanity is healthier, wealthier, happier, safer, better educated and more peaceful than ever before? What if there truly is no greater time to be alive than right now?

Steven Pinker — Professor of Psychology at Harvard University in the US and two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist and author of more than 10 books about human behaviour and instinct — has written that the idea of the present as a dystopia marked only by decay and suffering is "wrong-wrong, flat-earth wrong, couldn't-be-more-wrong." We're flourishing, he argues. Not only that, but our boundless cynicism has left us vulnerable to demagogues who weaponise ambient anxiety and use it to justify dangerous agendas.

Pinker's latest book, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*, is an encomium for the present. Rather than blindly panicking, he suggests we focus on "the historical sweep of progress," with an eye toward its perpetuation. "Every measure of human well-being has shown an increase," he told me recently. "You can't appreciate that reading the newspapers, because news is usually about things that go wrong. You never have a reporter standing in front of a school, saying, 'Here I am, reporting live in front of a school that hasn't been shot up today.'"

• • •

Taking a formal tour of the United Nations with a man who holds nine honorary doctorates (in addition to an actual doctorate, from Harvard, in experimental psychology) is surreal for a handful of reasons, chief among them being that he knows the right answer to every single question the guide asks.

Pinker, wearing black cowboy boots, jeans and a blue sweater, played it cool — he always waited to see if anyone else felt like venturing a guess first. Then he'd slowly raise a hand and deliver a casual but terrifyingly precise answer: There are 193 member nations. There have been 10 rogue nuclear tests since the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1996. The UN has identified 17 sustainable development goals to be achieved over a 15-year period that began in 2016. Our guide regarded us with suspicion. When Pinker wasn't answering her questions, we were chattering at each other, trailing the group, pausing to take pictures — in Pinker's words, two "bad students."

Enlightenment Now includes dozens of charts and matrices, some of which display data collected by the UN. But it's the organisation's very existence that best confirms the book's arguments. As we wandered its hallways, Pinker pointed to the UN's sustainability goals (which include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, reducing child mortality, ending gender discrimination, ensuring clean water and sanitation, and more) as evidence of a secular-humanist morality — a plain, shared sense of right and wrong that exists independent of institutions. "The concept of human rights hinges on the fact that we all have universal needs," Pinker explained after we'd retreated to a cafe in the basement of the building. "We'd all prefer to be alive than dead, well-fed than starving and healthy than sick, and we all want our kids to grow up, and everyone agrees that literacy is a good thing. So if we can combine universal human interests with a universal capacity for reason, we can define a bedrock that all humans share and that you can build a morality around."

Pinker first seeded the notion of a shared ethic in his 2002 book, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*. "The point of that book was to push back against the idea of a blank slate, not to deny that cultures differ," he said. "Obviously they differ, but I think beneath all of that variation there is a universal human nature given to us by evolution, and that helps ground concepts like universal human rights."

In many ways, *Enlightenment* Now feels like the apotheosis of Pinker's research. The book is in direct conversation with each of his previous titles but especially with 2011's *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, in which Pinker charts massive declines in violence of all forms and suggests that we've finally become more valuable to each other alive than dead. Bill Gates called it the "most inspiring book" he'd ever read. Mark Zuckerberg chose it as the second selection for his book club. *Enlightenment* Now elaborates on — and amplifies — its premise.

"Once you take a quantitative mindset instead of basing your view of the world on headlines, it's not just violence that's in decline, all these other measures of human well-being have improved, like lifespan, like poverty," Pinker said. "Very few people are aware that the percentage of the world that's in a state of extreme poverty has fallen from 90 percent of the world being poor 200 years ago to 10 percent today."

The book was conceived and partially written before the 2016 election, but the rise of Donald Trump is predicted in its pages. Pinker believes the ideas that inadvertently helped the current administration take office — that the world is in terrible shape, that the whole system deserves to crumble — are perpetuated by both the left and the right. Those ideas include "pessimism about the way the world is heading, cynicism about the institutions of modernity, and an inability to conceive of a higher purpose in anything other than religion," he writes. Trump both proves Pinker's point — this is what happens when we're subsumed by fear — and makes it harder to argue that the present moment is actually a victory.

"November 8, 2016 did require something of a rethink of the book," Pinker admitted. "I was in the middle of writing it. I'd conceived it back when Donald Trump was just kind of a joke, a reality-TV star. I could not have dreamed he would be President, and it certainly meant that any narrative that said we're in the midst of a period of progress needed a bit of qualification." He described Trump's agenda as "almost the opposite of the dream of the Enlightenment as manifested in the United Nations, among other things — namely, that we're all human, nations and governments are just conveniences, we're not primarily Frenchmen or Americans or Russians but human beings and that what we each want as individual humans we can only achieve if we cooperate on a global scale. Donald Trump hates the UN. His idea is that America comes first and every nation is in a zero-sum conflict with every other nation."

• • •

Pinker was born in 1954 in a Jewish community in Montreal. He got his bachelor's degree at McGill University and moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts for graduate school in 1976. After receiving his PhD from Harvard, he completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and ended up teaching there for 21 years. (In 2003 he left MIT for his current position at Harvard.) He married his third wife, novelist and philosopher Rebecca Goldstein, in 2007 and now has two stepdaughters.

He has a distinctive puff of curly white hair and blue eyes, and is recognised more or less constantly as we navigate various areas of the UN — by the uniformed security guard manning the metal detectors, by a young Norwegian man on our tour, by an employee who tentatively but excitedly scurries over while we're drinking coffee and eating crumb cake near the gift shop. Part of this, he assures me, is because of YouTube. Many of his lectures and talks are archived online. (A video in which he describes language as "a window to understanding the brain" has been viewed nearly a million times.) During each encounter, his acolytes appear dazed and then deferential. It is as if they believe they're meeting the man who can save them.

Although his work has been widely lauded — in 2004, *Time* named him one of the most influential people in the world — it's not without vocal detractors. Following the publication of *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, the statistician Nassim Taleb argued that what Pinker interprets as the "long peace" (a term Pinker borrowed from the historian John Gaddis) of the past several decades is really just a statistical blip and no guarantee of future safety. Taleb also lambasted Pinker for assuming "that the statistics of the 14th century can apply to the 21st." Pinker, who does not back off from lively debate, eventually responded that Taleb had

thoroughly misunderstood the book and that "accurate attribution and careful analysis of other people's ideas are not his strong suits."

Others have argued that Pinker's call for a return to the ideals of the Enlightenment, which he defines in the new book's subtitle as "reason, science, humanism and progress," fails to account for the atrocities the Enlightenment enabled. In a 2015 essay for *The Guardian*, the scholar and author John Gray writes, "You would never know, from reading Pinker, that Nazi 'scientific racism' was based in theories whose intellectual pedigree goes back to Enlightenment thinkers such as the prominent Victorian psychologist and eugenicist Francis Galton."

In January, the day before Pinker and I met, a video surfaced in which Pinker, speaking at an event at Harvard, referred to "the often highly literate, highly intelligent people who gravitate to the alt-right" and observed that they were both "internet savvy" and "media savvy." That might seem innocent enough — he was merely stating that it's dangerous to dismiss the opposition as a gang of drooling thugs — except the alt-right chose to seize on it as a benediction. The white nationalist Richard Spencer retweeted the video. The Daily Stormer, a neo-Nazi website, published an article with the headline BIG NIBBA HARVARD JEW PROFESSOR ADMITS THE ALT RIGHT IS RIGHT ABOUT EVERYTHING. Jesse Singal, writing in *The New York Times*, used the kerfuffle as an object lesson about the dangers of decontextualised misinformation, perpetuated endlessly via social media. Pinker saw larger forces at play: "It really stems from a political tribalism in which each side is so convinced of its rightness and the evil of its enemy that it resorts to any tactic, including dishonest doctoring of records and vitriolic name-calling, to stoke outrage and tribal loyalty. You also see it in cable news, political rallies, books, partisan websites."

Still, the episode had its upside. "I'd be all too happy if alt-right men checked out my book, hoping for support. At best I might deconvert some of them to classical liberalism. At worst they'd get a rude shock."

• • •

Somehow I manage to make an absurd suggestion — let's go ice-skating at Rockefeller Center! — seem like a reasonable follow-up to our UN visit. It was vaguely relevant, after all, to our conversation: The rink was beset by an enormous Christmas tree on one end and a golden statue of Prometheus, the mythological Greek Titan sometimes known as the God of Forethought, on the other.

Pinker was down.

We laced up our rental skates in something called a "heated igloo" and shoved off. Of course, interviewing someone while cruising around a frozen puddle on sharpened metal blades is a fool's errand, and it didn't help that he was cutting graceful circles around the ice while I was half waddling, half lunging and frightening the small children in my path. After a few laps, we retreated to a nearby restaurant for a round of drinks. What I wanted to know was: What happens next? How do we circumvent whatever instinct causes us to crave catastrophe or at least its attendant drama?

"I think there certainly is a thirst for the dramatic, the catastrophic, but there's also a thirst for morality tales, particularly morality tales in which one's own tribe is on the side of the angels and there's some evil enemy to blame misfortune on," he explained. "There's great satisfaction taken in comeuppance to a villain. A lot of entertainment has a hero who gets in trouble and faces an adversary. The adversary has a temporary victory but in the end is vanquished. I think we like reality that conforms to that kind of dramatic archetype."

In *Enlightenment Now*, Pinker comes down with surprising force on institutions I'd previously thought of as plainly noble, including mainstream environmentalism, as conceived in the 1970s and perpetuated by figures like Al Gore ("greenism is laced with misanthropy, including an indifference to starvation, an indulgence in ghoulish fantasies of a depopulated planet, and Nazi-like comparisons of human beings to vermin, pathogens and cancer," he writes), and contemporary journalism ("Whether or not the world really is getting worse, the nature of news will interact with the nature of cognition to make us think that it is"). But given an instinctive hunger for turmoil, how do we overturn the old axiom "If it bleeds, it leads"?

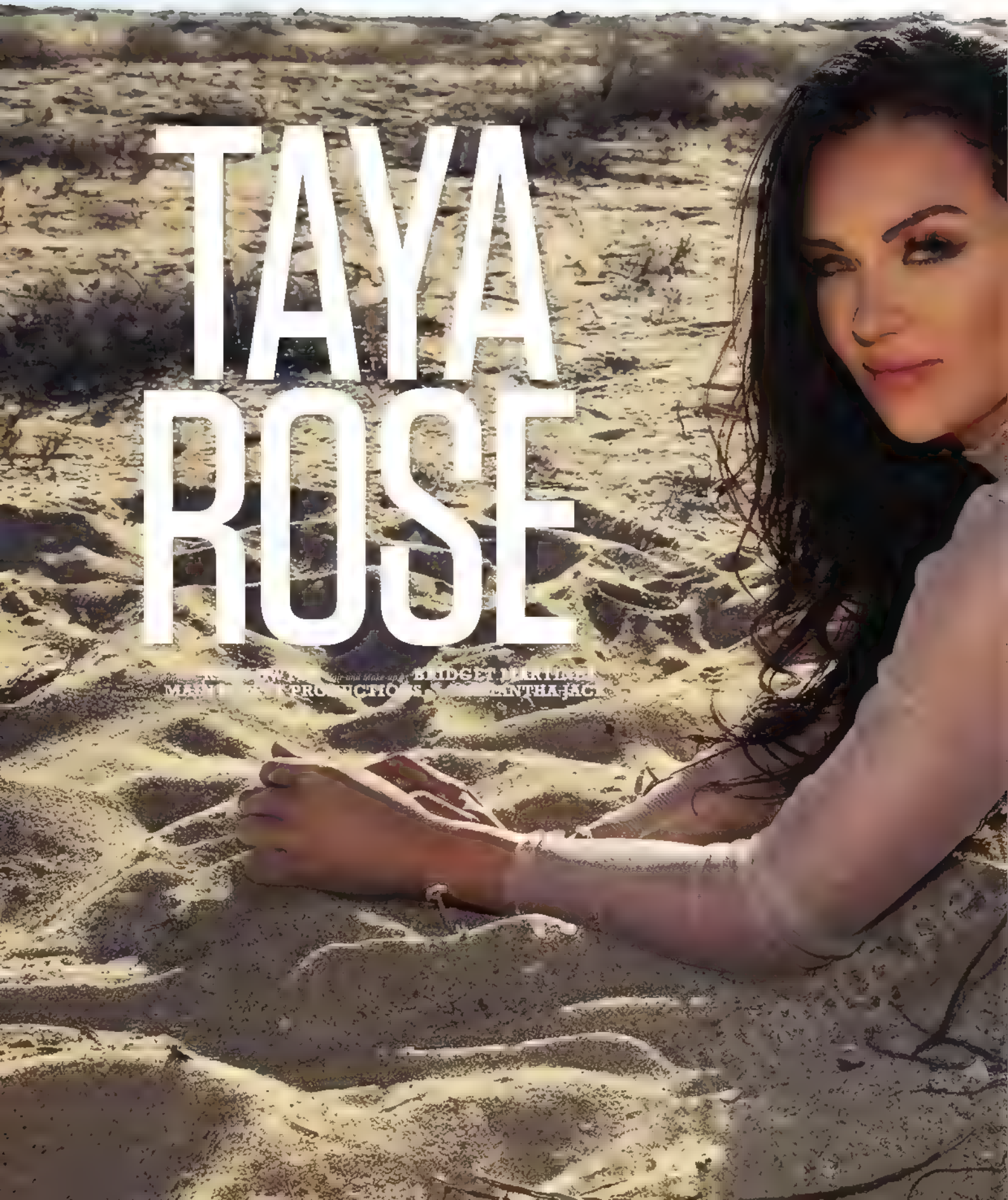
"A responsible journalist who believes that they have a mission to expose problems and tell of people suffering also has to include cases in which problems are solved and improvements occur," Pinker said. "Otherwise, life sucks and then you die. Which licences fatalism. Why try to make the world a better place if people will screw it up no matter what you do? That thinking really saps any commitment or application of ingenuity to solving problems. What I would advocate is definitely not balancing the terrorist attacks with puff pieces but rather to highlight what goes right. It's not fluff if fewer kids are starving to death. It's not fluff if the Guinea worm is being eliminated. It's not fluff if the rate of homelessness has gone down."

If journalism doesn't correct itself — and Pinker believes it can — it's on the rest of us not to perpetuate false and hysterical ideas about the state of the world. Reorienting is a complicated and personal process but hardly impossible. "The question is not how do you make us perfect but how do you bring out the parts of us that can co-operate, can plan for the future and empathise and organise our affairs so that those parts of human nature are in control?"

As we finished our drinks, I asked Pinker if he considered himself an optimist. His work, after all, advocates for the recognition of human dexterity and wisdom — on giving equal time to all the things we get right. "I probably am, by temperament," he admitted, then reminded me that his work is all based on data, he's simply pointing out the facts. And the facts can change. We're better off now, but that doesn't protect us from setbacks and regression.

"One of the reasons I didn't call the book *Progress or A Manifesto for Progress or Three Cheers for Progress or Progress Rocks* is that progress isn't an inexorable force," he said. "There are certain ideas and values that have given us the progress we've enjoyed so far, and if we redouble our efforts and our commitment to those values, then progress could continue. And if we don't, they won't." With that, he drained his beer and smiled. ■

"I'D BE ALL TOO HAPPY IF ALT-RIGHT MEN CHECKED OUT MY BOOK."


TAYA
ROSE

A Washington native, Taya currently resides in Seattle where she loves cheering on Seattle sports teams, especially the Seahawks. She is a curvaceous brunette standing at 1.67m with a confident walk that demands your attention. She draws eyes with her curvy measurements; 34D, 66cm waist and 91cm hips. Irish and Native American heritage make for a fiery combination, she's a wild thing!

She loves to travel and feels at home in the great outdoors. Taya seeks out hikes and outdoor activities in each country and state she visits. Her favourite trip to date was Havana, Cuba, for its intoxicating beauty and amazing people. "I believe visiting foreign countries and experiencing other cultures first hand is important for growth and perspective. It has changed the way I see life and my values."

Hobbies and interests

I'm a huge animal lover! Especially dogs, so if you have one I'd love to take on the role as step-mama! I'm an active person by nature, but I can also enjoy wine and movie night with cuddles. It's all about who you're with and finding a good balance of activity and down time.

Turn-ons

I love a man who is still a kid at heart, who finds humour in everything and still enjoys the small things in life. That's a big turn on. A man who is truly a strong leader does not mistreat others. One of the sexiest things I've ever seen was a man whose presence alone demanded respect. People followed his lead not out of fear or force, but out of a deeper admiration and respect.

I love a genuinely good-hearted man. I'm always up for adventure and spontaneity. A man who can keep up with my high energy is such a turn-on! I have an insatiable hunger for new experiences and raw adventure. I'm a thrill seeker and believe in trying everything once. Well, almost everything ;)

Turn-offs

I get really turned off by men who are full of themselves. There's a big difference between confident and egotistical. Negativity is another big turn off. I quickly separate myself from men who are pessimistic and fail to see that happiness is a choice. Life is not happening to us, it is responding to us! We create our lives and I choose to create a happy one.

Girl crush

Adriana Lima, Tammy Hembrow, Selena Gomez

To follow more of Taya's adventures follow her on Instagram @_tayarose_

Worldmags.net

www.orkut-image.net

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: JOHN KRASINSKI

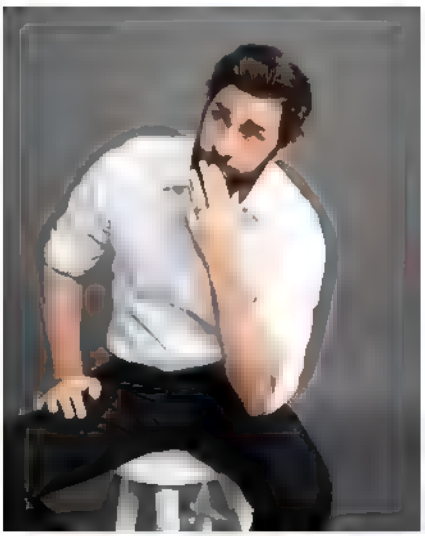
A candid conversation with America's favourite office drone on how he outlived his defining role and ended up directing himself (and his wife) in a stylish and highly allegorical horror film

In the fall of 2003, 23-year-old John Krasinski called his mother back home in Newton, Massachusetts and told her he was sticking to their deal: He was quitting. Upon graduating from Brown University with a degree in English, he set off for New York City to be an actor. His parents had been supportive. They always were to their three boys, of whom John was the youngest (and, at six-foot-three, the shortest). He'd already lived in New York a few summers earlier when he interned for *Late Night With Conan O'Brien*. But if he didn't have some decent prospects after three years, his mom had said, he should rethink things. Well, almost three years had passed, and what did Krasinski have to show for it? An off-off-Broadway play, a walk-on part on an episode of *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, a failed TV pilot. Sure, he'd done a commercial for DeWalt power tools with NASCAR driver Matt Kenseth, but he still had to wait tables, one of the thousands of anonymous actors hustling to survive the slaughterhouse of small-town dreams that is Manhattan. Nope, he told his mom, he was done. "At least ride out the year," she said. Three weeks later, Krasinski got a call to audition for another TV pilot: a remake of a pseudo-documentary British comedy series.

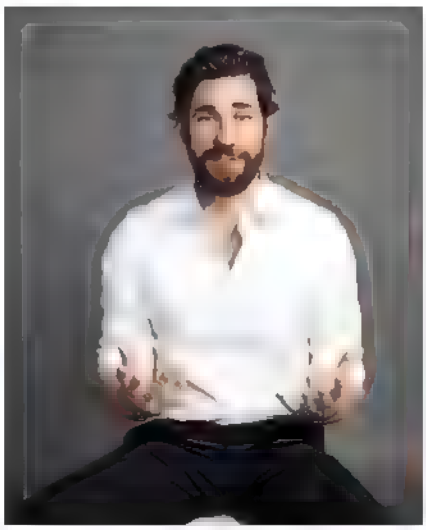
The Office would run on NBC for nine seasons, receive more than 40 Emmy nominations and make Krasinski a star. (It would do the same for his Newton South High School classmate BJ Novak.) His character, Scranton, Pennsylvania, paper salesman Jim Halpert, is a refreshing outlier among the angst-ridden, id-fuelled male TV characters so celebrated at the time: the Tony Sopranos and Walter Whites and Don Drapers. A nice, relatable guy.

Krasinski would be similarly cast in his early film roles, including the comedies *License to Wed* with Robin Williams, *Leatherheads* with George Clooney and *It's Complicated* with Alec Baldwin and Meryl Streep. Yet like Jim Halpert, Krasinski was more complex than he seemed and eager to challenge himself, and in the following years he avoided the pigeonholed fate that befalls so many actors who play beloved television characters. He adapted and directed a film version of the David Foster Wallace book *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, got ripped to play a military contractor in Michael Bay's controversial Benghazi film *13 Hours*, worked with acclaimed directors Sam Mendes and Cameron Crowe, starred in and co-wrote with Matt Damon the fracking thriller *Promised Land*, and directed a second feature, *The Hollars*, with a cast that includes Anna Kendrick, Richard Jenkins and Mary Elizabeth Winstead.

Krasinski's career has become one of the most enjoyably unpredictable in modern Hollywood, and this year that capriciousness continues with two very different projects. He's reprising Tom Clancy's famous CIA agent Jack Ryan in an Amazon series of the same name, and co-writing,



"The moment I got The Office, I asked my business manager how much money I had and I offered that exact amount to David Foster Wallace's agent."



"This is a much bigger movement than just sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is the by-product of a system that failed women a long time ago."

"The fans saved us. I remember walking through New York and some guy was like, 'Hey, man, you're on my iPod.' I was like, 'First off, what's an iPod?'"

Photography by **JAKE CHESSUM**

directing and starring in *A Quiet Place*, a horror film about a family who must live in silence lest they arouse a monstrous entity. His wife in the film is portrayed by his real-life spouse of eight years, actress Emily Blunt, with whom he has two children, both girls. It marks their first time working together.

Krasinski, now 38, took a break from editing *A Quiet Place* to speak with playboy contributor and Simon & Schuster senior editor **Sean Manning** on the West Side of Manhattan. "I'd read several interviews in which he referred to himself as 'winning the lottery,' " Manning says, "and he was just as humble and self-effacing in person. Apparently he'd f#cked up his leg shooting an action scene for Jack Ryan, but he never grimaced or expressed discomfort. I didn't know about the injury till the end of our session, when he got up and I noticed his limp. But there's more: Our conversation kept turning to moments when he had operated 'purely on emotion,' whether he was directing his first feature or rescuing a complete stranger from a riptide. Beneath the affable exterior lies a deeply instinctual mind — one that defaults to bravery and human kindness when things get scary. Fitting, then, that the whole thing should start with horror."

PLAYBOY: You'd talked for some time about doing a project with your wife. You always said it would probably be a play. Instead, here you are doing a horror movie together. How the hell did that happen?

KRASINSKI: You know, we didn't want the story of our marriage to supersede the story of the movie, and that can easily happen. So I think, on first look, we thought doing a play together would keep it contained and about something that was once in a lifetime. Then I got the part for *Jack Ryan*, and the producers on that film, who are Michael Bay's producers, asked, "Would you ever be in a genre film?" I told them, "The hook would have to be something interesting. I don't want to just run around and get butchered." And they said, "Well, there's this really cool spec script that we got." We'd just had our second daughter and, you know, I'm a super sensitive, emotional person, so I think I was probably wide-open when I read the script. The idea really triggered something inside me about protection and parenting, and I just thought maybe I could make it a metaphor for parenthood: the fact that no matter what, there will come a time when you don't have control over what your kids do, what they say, what they think, and you just hope that the preparation was enough to get them through and they survive. There was something so beautiful about putting a family in a situation where — without giving too much away, this is the one family in the world that needs to talk and can't. They're going through something they should really be talking about with each other and a therapist, and they can't. We not only thought the story was so unique and different that there was no way our marriage could supersede it, but that, weirdly, our marriage fit right in.

PLAYBOY: Were you a fan of horror movies growing up?

KRASINSKI: The complete opposite. I remember once, I want to say I was eight, and my brothers and I were all hanging out at the house of this neighbourhood kid who'd gotten his hands on *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. I was debating how to get out of there, and my oldest brother said, "John's too young. I'm going to take him home." When we got back home, my brother was like, "I didn't want to see that either." He was terrified too, and he used me as an out! Ever since then, I've felt much more comfortable just saying I can't watch that. That's not to say I don't love the more classic genre movies. Jaws is one of my favourites. And *Let the Right One In* is one of the best movies I've seen — the original. So I can do it. There's just a threshold that I can't cross.

Wherever you stand politically, I don't think "Make America Great Again" is supposed to be up to our politicians.

PLAYBOY: It seems in the past few years we've seen a real renaissance for horror movies that also function as societal commentary. There was *It Follows* and slut shaming, *Green Room* and white supremacy, and of course *Get Out*.

KRASINSKI: Yeah, *Get Out* and *Don't Breathe* and all that stuff. I saw all those movies when I was researching for *A Quiet Place*. They're much more elevated and say so much more than just "Where do you put the camera to scare the person the most?"

PLAYBOY: You just said *A Quiet Place* is a metaphor for parenthood, but I wonder if you might also be making a statement about how deadly silence can be, how you can't be quiet and say nothing and hope the monster goes away; you have to speak out and confront the thing.

KRASINSKI: That's exactly it. I think in our political situation, that's what's going on now. You can close your eyes and stick your head in the sand, or you can try to participate in whatever's going on. I think that's what *Jaws* was for me. That character was scared to be a cop in New York, so he ran away from his fears to an island. The one thing he never wanted was a scary situation, and it's now surrounding him. That's kind of where I was coming from.

PLAYBOY: So then, shifting to politics...

KRASINSKI: Oh God.

PLAYBOY: In Trump's comments about sh!thole countries, one of those he cited was El Salvador. Just before you went to college, you spent a few months teaching English in Central America, in Costa Rica. What was that experience like for you and what was your reaction to what the President said?

KRASINSKI: That experience changed my life completely. I was 17 years old. I'd graduated early from high school because of my birth date and had gotten into Brown midyear, so I had to go six months later, in January. And I decided to go down to Costa Rica. My dad didn't tell me until I got back that he and my mom were terrified I was going. The family I stayed with forced me to speak only Spanish, so it was anything but a cool, *pura vida* Costa Rica experience. I went there to teach English at a Spanish-speaking school. I was volunteering, but they literally didn't have enough work for me to do, so they very politely fired me and I had to scramble to get a new job. I ended up at an English-speaking high school, teaching seniors all the stuff I'd just learned. I asked my mom to send down my books from school, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Canterbury Tales* and all that stuff. I was teaching from the notes in the margins of my books. I never told them how old I was. They would ask, "How old are you?" and I was like, "How old do you *think* I am?" They would say, "Twenty-seven?" and I was like, "Perfect." But all these things were happening when I was 17 years old. I also travelled by myself. One of the places I went was this amazing beach called Manuel Antonio that I didn't realise had an insane riptide. While I was swimming there — this is a story I've never told anybody — this Costa Rican girl and an American guy were swimming right>>

next to me, and we were knee-deep. I went underwater for a second, and when I came back up he was screaming at the top of his lungs. Literally in three seconds the girl had been swept 150 metres out.

PLAYBOY: Holy shit.

KRASINSKI: My mom was a lifeguard and taught us to swim very early. In that moment, I didn't ask anyone. There was no one to help me. I just went out and tried to save her. And then of course when I got out there, I was in a crosscurrent with her. It was one of those moments of "Oh my God, you just made a poor choice and it might cost you your life." But I didn't think about it like that. It was just this survival instinct. It was really weird — like the girl was asking me to let her die. But I got her back. When I got within 20 yards or so of the shore, some surfers came out. Granted, not everybody needs to have life-or-death experiences, but that changed my entire life. All of a sudden I grew up.

When I got to Brown, I remember kids calling their parents and saying, "I miss home" and "I'm lonely," which I totally get, but I was so far beyond that. Whereas college should have been my defining moment, Costa Rica was. It just ripped all the protective layers apart and allowed me to get hurt. And you know, not to keep circling back to *A Quiet Place*, but there is something about that — at some point you have to let your kids get hurt. That's very palpable in my life right now with my girls. I hope I'm brave enough to be as good as my parents were.

PLAYBOY: I think travelling is one of the most important things anyone can do. From afar, anything looks scary, but then you get there and it's like, "Oh shit, I had no clue."

KRASINSKI: Absolutely. And to me, what was overwhelming and a religious or spiritual moment in my life was seeing joy in abject poverty. Seeing true happiness, not just survival. You know, we look at it from the outside and say, "My God, these people are living on dirt floors." And they have more joy than a lot of people I know. I was moved at the power of what was able to be achieved in the category of happiness with nothing.

PLAYBOY: Different priorities.

KRASINSKI: So different — things like family and a lot of the ideals that I know we still have in America. In my opinion, the whole idea of making America great again is so much more on us than anybody else. Wherever you stand politically, I don't think "Make America Great Again" is supposed to be up to our politicians. It needs to be on us. You go down there and realise they're making their country great by living every single day.

PLAYBOY: I covered the 2016 Republican National Convention for Playboy.com, and I was in Quicken Loans Arena the night two of the contractors who survived Benghazi, Mark Geist and John Tiegen, gave a speech. Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz were also referencing *13 Hours* on the campaign trail, and Trump rented out a theatre in Iowa to screen it for free. After all that and then the outcome of the election, did you have any misgivings about doing the film?

KRASINSKI: I didn't have any misgivings; I had real sadness. I felt maybe the system had done those men a disservice, because this was going to be such an awesome awakening for people to get to hear the true story. Who the hell knows that story? I didn't know anything about Benghazi. You know, it was a word in a headline, which I think put me among the large majority of people who thought they knew what Benghazi was but had absolutely no clue. There were no politics that night. That was a situation where someone was in trouble, and these guys — sure, they were contractors in that moment, but they had long ago given their oaths to the military. They have to help that person. We have deleted that part of the story from the narrative. You take out the idea of these six men going in and trying to do things that we can't comprehend. You take that out and you go, "Yeah, that was amazing — but look how horrible all this political stuff is from the fallout." The reason I did the movie is because I felt that was wrong. I felt it was wrong to have any political conversation. It was purely about telling the story of these men I looked up to and still look up to. You know, I grew up in a big military family. That was always really important to me. I think, to be honest, it may be one of the most important movies I've done or experiences I've ever had in my career. I remember a woman came up to me and said, "Thank you for making that movie. That was about my husband." I said, "Oh, where was your husband? Was he CIA, or was he in Benghazi?" And she said, "No, he died in Iraq 12 years ago, but that's his story too." Again, I'm very sensitive, so I'll tear up just talking about it, but that stuff changes your life. We knew it was a hotbutton issue while we were shooting it. We certainly knew it was a hot-button issue as the campaigns fired up. And I think it was actually just before opening when Trump rented out the theatre. This has nothing to do with politics. This has something to do with the universality of the idea that the military should never be politicised. This is a universal thing we should all get behind no matter who you are, because you are living in the country these people allowed you to live in. Literally, they've allowed you to live here because of what they did. So that is why I was so bummed — not because of any specific political reason but more because we knew that was going to change the narrative of our movie.

PLAYBOY: With *Jack Ryan*, you're once again in the world of the military and the CIA. I assume that when you researched for the part you talked to people in that sphere. Did you get a sense of how they're feeling within the current administration?

KRASINSKI: We went to the CIA to have our first meeting the same week Trump was bashing the CIA and saying it's — I'm paraphrasing — sort of null and void and we don't need them and

they're a bunch of jokers. So that certainly wasn't a great vibe. But I don't think anybody in the CIA would tell you they're a Democrat or a Republican. I'm sure a whole lot of people at the CIA are Republicans, and I'm sure a whole lot of people at the CIA are Democrats. I think they'd tell you there's no politics in that building. And they basically said as much, that they have dedicated their lives to saving other people, to trying to thwart bad things.

PLAYBOY: Tom Clancy created the Jack Ryan franchise, but you seem to have more literary tastes. You've worked with the novelist Dave Eggers on *Away We Go* and *Promised Land*, and you adapted and directed David Foster Wallace's novel *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*. How did you end up doing that project?

KRASINSKI: That's a really interesting story. Reading that book was the moment I realised what acting really was.

PLAYBOY: How old were you when you read it?

KRASINSKI: I was in college. I went to Brown thinking I was going to be an English teacher. I even had very foggy ideas of playing basketball there. When I got there and realised I wouldn't play basketball because I wasn't good enough and it wasn't a life I wanted to dedicate myself to, I had no idea what to do. I was bizarrely shy, and I joined this sketch-comedy group because I loved *Saturday Night Live* and wanted to be a part of the community. At that point, the smartest, most freethinking, open, engaging, interesting people were in theatre. Chris Hayes, who's on MSNBC now, was a director at Brown back then, and he came up to me one day and said, "Listen, I'm going to do this thing called *Brief Interviews*. It's interviews with guys. Would you do one?" And I said, "Yeah, absolutely, no problem." I was so insecure at the time that I was thrilled to be chosen, it was still that thing of being picked for the team. I think we were supposed to do only one or maybe two nights, and I would say maybe 90 to 100 people could fit in the room where we were doing it. Two hundred and fifty people showed up and about 200 of them got turned away. I remember walking through campus and a teacher came up to me and said, "That was one of the greatest things I've ever seen at the student theatre." And another teacher, on the exact same day, said, "I thought that was offensive and grotesque." Getting someone to react is powerful; that was the first example for me. You could make an impact. You could change people's lives. I mean, people in the audience were crying. They'd gone through very specific things that we were talking about, which if you know the book, you know there's some really dark stuff in there. And to have people connect to that dark stuff, that changed my whole outlook. The moment I got *The Office*, I asked my business manager how much money I had, and I offered that exact amount to David Foster Wallace's agent. I remember very clearly she said no. And I said, "Can I come out and talk to you about it?" So I flew out to Los Angeles and talked to her about it.

PLAYBOY: Damn, how ballsy and...

KRASINSKI: Stupid. [*laughs*] I think it gets back to that whole Costa Rica thing. I just didn't understand why you wouldn't do it. Because if I don't do it, then no one else is going to do it. So it was ignorance. Directing it was the exact same thing. I was looking for a director forever, and it was Rainn Wilson who said, "You should direct it." So I went and directed it, and it was like walking through a minefield that you have no idea is a minefield. At the end, I remember my director of photography said, "Congratulations, that was really good." And I said, "Yeah, it was fun. It was easy." And he was like, "It was anything but easy," and then showed me all the things that could have gone wrong. I was going purely on emotion.

I went underwater for a second, and when I came back up he was screaming at the top of his lungs.

PLAYBOY: Did you ever meet Wallace? Did he offer you any suggestions on adapting the book? And did he get to see any of the footage before he died?

KRASINSKI: I spoke to David only once, on the phone. I was nervous as hell. Then I was blown away by how incredibly gentle he was. So kind. So generous. We discussed his discomfort with having any of his work made into a movie. He said something to the effect that he writes books with the understanding that once they're published, that's it. That is their life. It felt strange to him to have something he thought he was done with taken to a new medium. And I got that. That said, he was incredibly supportive and generous about my making the movie. I remember he said he wasn't sure if he wanted to hear about the screenplay and what I had done to the story. And then he said he let temptation get the best of him and asked me to tell him. I did. He was very kind about it. He remembered one of our writers on *The Office* — the great Mike Schur, who had invited him to Harvard for an award while Mike was a student there. I remember asking David if he would ever like to come visit Mike and me on set. He asked me where we shot. When I told him the studio was in Van Nuys, a ways from where he taught, at Pomona, he simply replied, "No, that's okay. I'm not a big fan of driving." I always loved that. Sadly, he passed during the sound mix of the movie, only weeks before we went to Sundance, and never saw a frame.

PLAYBOY: The common perception of artists is that they're these existentially tormented, emotionally fragile people. In his *Playboy Interview*, Jon Hamm, who lost both his parents by the time he was 20 years old, said, "I think anybody who chooses any kind of career in the arts comes from a place of being a little bit unmoored. If I had grown up in a two-parent household and had parents telling me what to do, I'm sure their first piece of advice would not have been 'You should be an actor. You should move to LA with no money. That sounds like the best plan.'" And yet that's pretty much what happened with you.

KRASINSKI: Yeah, exactly.

PLAYBOY: So do you not have any demons?

KRASINSKI: Oh, I'm sure I have demons, and I'm sure I have darknesses and insecurities and all those things. Absolutely. I'm lucky enough to be surrounded by incredible friends and family who keep me on track and don't let me spin out into my own universe for too long — namely, and most important, my wife. I think my wife gets me. Not just to sound adorable, but the truth is she gets me more than anyone else has ever gotten me. And so she allows me to, for lack of a better term, bottom out for a second and get really scared. Like right now in the editing process, some stuff works amazing and some stuff doesn't. And when it doesn't, I get really nervous, like, "Will I ever get to this place?" And she says, "Yeah, just keep at it. One step at a time." But to Jon Hamm's quote, I totally understand that I'm an anomaly, but I'm completely unmoored in the artistic sense. I wasn't trained. One of my dear friends, Billy Crudup, went to New York University, arguably one of the best schools you can go to for acting, and he came out and completely dominated everything he did. I just saw him in this one-man show, and it blew my mind to watch this guy do hairpin turns between drama and comedy and timing and 11 different characters. I guarantee you, if you gave me 64>>

years, I could never do that. So maybe I'm wrong. Maybe there is something about having all that training. But I feel lucky that I wasn't trained. Sam Mendes said, "I love working with you as an actor, because I've never worked with someone who runs 240 kilometres an hour at a wall when I tell them to, and when you hit it and I was wrong, you turn around and I give you another wall, and you run 240 kilometres an hour into that wall too."

On *13 Hours*, I teared up almost every day on set. I felt I was a part of something. I felt I was in a moment of incredible power, rather than "Okay, this is great and I love talking to Navy SEALs, but I've got to go in this dark corner and light a candle, and I've got to 'red leather, yellow leather.' " I also know that about my wife. My wife didn't train. There's something unbridled about her that feels really organic, and it's what makes her such a powerful actress.

PLAYBOY: Was it surreal when you first started dating? By that point she'd already been in a bunch of films, including *The Devil Wears Prada*, and had won a Golden Globe.

KRASINSKI: Yeah, when we first started dating, that was weird. I remember she'd done this *Vanity Fair* cover with Amy Adams, Jessica Biel and a couple of other people – "young up-and-coming hot Hollywood" or whatever – and that issue was in my living room when we first started dating. I don't think she had *Boston* magazine with me on the front wearing Celtics, Red Sox and Bruins stuff. I don't think she had that in her living room.

PLAYBOY: She had your Matt Kenseth commercial queued up.

KRASINSKI: Yeah, exactly. I was definitely aware of it, probably in a way that could have been extremely unhealthy if it wasn't for how insanely down-to-earth she was. I remember being at my house and saying to her, "So I just want to have this really honest conversation. I think you're one of the best act..." I didn't even get out "actress." She went, "No, no, no, *no*!" Very loud. We didn't have that conversation again for a really long time, and it saved our relationship. We got to have a very removed existence, because we just looked at it as though we were two people who had fallen in love, rather than two Hollywood celebrities who'd met each other. I remember people saying, "Wow, for Hollywood you guys have been together forever." And I was like, "What does that mean?" I mean, I would say nine years is average for most people. I'm a son of two people who have been married for man, is it going to be 45 years this year?

PLAYBOY: Okay, so that leads us to the sex questions. This being playboy, you knew they were coming.

KRASINSKI: Sex questions. I'm terrible at these, but let's do it. Here comes the mask.

PLAYBOY: You've said in previous interviews that you weren't much of a ladies' man in high school.

KRASINSKI: Yep, I wanted to be.

PLAYBOY: You said that you would adore girls from afar and they would just end up asking you to sign their yearbook.

KRASINSKI: Yep.

PLAYBOY: But BJ Novak once told Playboy, "John was popular and smart, and if he liked a girl, he would just ask her out."

KRASINSKI: That is completely false.

PLAYBOY: Who is telling the truth here?

KRASINSKI: Hey, listen, I will take his lens over mine any day. I don't think I dated anyone in high school, to be honest. I think dating for me was something I was so nervous to do. I had a nerdy version of relationships. I really wanted to be married from a young age, because my parents were really happily married and that seemed really cool: having a partner, having a best friend. The idea of one-night stands felt much less cool to me and much more rife with anxiety.

PLAYBOY: Did you get any scandalous fan mail while you were on *The Office*? Were there Jim Halpert groupies?

KRASINSKI: Girls were really nervous to meet me because they felt they had gone through a relationship with me. You know, everybody says, "Well, you're in their home. That's the difference with television." I remember rolling my eyes at that. But then when I was doing *Leatherheads* with George Clooney, he said, "No, it's a real thing. If I walked down a street and Brad Pitt walked down a street, they would point and go, 'Oh my God, that's Brad Pitt.' And then one of them would run up and punch me in the arm and go, 'Dr Ross!' " Because they know you and they've had their own relationship with you. So that's what I experienced. But as much of that as you get from girls, more of it's from the dudes. A lot of dudes just want to buy you a beer, which I'll take any day.

PLAYBOY: Whenever people talk about the golden age of TV in the 2000s, they're always quick to mention *Mad Men, Breaking Bad, The Wire*...

KRASINSKI: *The Office*.

PLAYBOY: Well, that was my question.

KRASINSKI: Come on, man, *The Office* was fourth? Jesus.

PLAYBOY: When people talk about this sort of golden age, *The Sopranos*...

KRASINSKI: I remember being a waiter at Sushisamba, down on Seventh Avenue. I was a waiter everywhere. I think I was fired from nine jobs, because as soon as you go for an audition, they say, "If you walk out this door, don't ever come back." And I'd say okay. But at Sushisamba, I remember Sunday nights up until 8:15 it would be packed. And then at 9pm, zero people. That was back in the day when people ran home to see *The Sopranos*.

PLAYBOY: Yeah, there was no HBO Go then.

KRASINSKI: No, and who wants to watch that on VHS or whatever?

PLAYBOY: But when people list those golden-age shows, they rarely include the really amazing comedies of that time – *The Office, Arrested Development, 30 Rock*. Do you think comedy still gets the shaft compared with drama?

KRASINSKI: That depends on what crew you're in. When I was growing up, Jim Carrey, Chris Farley – those were my heroes. In New York I would go to comedy clubs. I was going down to Upright Citizens Brigade and watching all these geniuses. One of the biggest influences on me, period, was Conan O'Brien. What he did on that show, especially the 12:30 slot, was mind-blowingly wild. It was instructual. It was funny. He was taking chances. And I got to be his intern and learned a lot there. Amy Poehler was a day player on *Conan* whenever he needed that character of his little sister or something. And Matt Walsh and all those people. So I was huge into the comedy nerdom of it. I remember when *Arrested Development* came on, I was like, "I can't believe there's something this crazy on a national network." I thought it was the best thing I'd ever seen. The fact that they would call jokes back from six episodes ago, and if you didn't get it, they didn't care. That was bold to me. Then the original British version of *The Office* came out. Someone I knew had that black DVD box set and was like, "You've got to watch this." I remember thinking, That's it? They did only 13 episodes? That's got to be something special.

What *The Sopranos* did that led to *The Wire* and then to *Mad Men*, that was already happening in comedy. I also knew that what we were doing on *The Office* was groundbreaking. I think the first episode was "Diversity Day," and I remember reading that script and being uncomfortable, thinking, If I'm uncomfortable and this is on NBC, this is a moment. I don't think we'll do many of these. I truly thought we were going to get cancelled, and we were threatened with cancellation all the time. Because nobody got it. You know, we legitimately owe everything to our fans, because it was the moment of iTunes. Because of the fact that people were paying $1.99 to see a show they could see for free on Thursdays, I think very begrudgingly NBC was like, "Fine," and picked us up. The fans saved us. I remember walking through New York and some guy was like, "Hey, man, you're on my iPod." I was like, "First off, what's an iPod?" And second, I was like, "That's my face on a two-inch screen. What is happening?" That was a weird one.

PLAYBOY: Somewhat related to that idea of being out of your comfort zone: What was the

scariest thing about working with your wife?

KRASINSKI: I think the scariest thing is that I didn't want to let her down. I was so moved when she said, "You can't let anybody else do this movie. I have to do it." It really was the best compliment of my career. I respect her and her choices and her class and her taste. That sounds like heady actor babble, but it's true. I remember she got this script, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*, when we were together. She said, "I really like this script." I think I said to her, *"Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*? You can't get a better title than that?" And she said, "It's really special. It's something really cool." I told her, "Well, pitch it to me." And she said, "Well, it's about this guy who's trying to start salmon fishing in Yemen because it's meditative." And I was like, "Not getting any better." She was definitely in that rising-star moment, but she knew this script was what she wanted to do. And that showed me strength and conviction and taste in a way I certainly didn't have.

I was sort of like, "Oh God, I've got to stay relevant and stay working." You know, I was just doing whatever movie I could do. I got very lucky having some of my first movies be *Leatherheads* and *Away We Go*. I worked with great directors on great material. But I was still just doing whatever I could get. I would have done anything. Emily was much more measured, much more specific, much more confident. I remember referencing that to her, and she didn't get it. She was like, "What do you mean? It's just good." And I was like, "Yeah, but it's so much more tempting to just do whatever it takes to… you know, when your agent is like, 'This is a hot script.' " And she was like, "I don't do hot scripts. I do what I like." So, working with her on *A Quiet Place*, I didn't want to get to the end and be like, "Whoops, I duffed that one." It was just a constant awareness and making sure the movie was as good for her, if not better, than it was for me.

PLAYBOY: Look at it from her perspective. Here's this guy who has co-written a screenplay with Academy Award–winning screenwriter Matt Damon, who was the lead actor in one of the most popular TV series of all time, who premiered the two previous films he directed at Sundance. Who else would she want to work with?

KRASINSKI: She was lucky! Yeah, that's the way I'm going to go with it.

PLAYBOY: Seriously, though, maybe being too humble is your demon.

KRASINSKI: There is a very similar background to being from Boston and being from London. In London, Emily says, it's called "tall poppy syndrome." Which is, as a society, you celebrate everyone, and if you get too tall as a poppy they knock you down so that you're the same level as everybody else. And there's something about that with Boston too. Everybody loves celebrating when you do well in Boston, but no one wants to hear you say you're the best. If Tom Brady today was like, "I am the greatest of all time," they'd be like, "Get out of here, Brady!" To be honest, and it probably sounds super — what's the word? conceited, but one of my favourite things is when people in articles or on Twitter say, "He seems like a really good guy." That was kind of the directive from my parents. Just be a good person. That to me is so much of a compliment, as much as people saying, "Wow, man, amazing performance." Just being a good person, I think in this day and age, is really all we should be striving for, because that's how anything will get done.

PLAYBOY: Which is a good transition to the #MeToo and Time's Up movements. Having a spouse who has worked in the entertainment industry for a while, were you aware of any of this horrible stuff? Had you two talked about it?

KRASINSKI: No. We definitely had the conversation once it blew up to the level that it did. I felt terrible and borderline embarrassed that I hadn't asked her about it. I was like, "Have you ever had a bad experience?" I think she said in *Vanity Fair*, like, "I've had my bum pinched a couple times, but…." First of all, I believe I can't add anything to the conversation. There's so much that has been said and is continuing to be said, and all the things that need to be said are at least out there and on the table now. What we actually piece through and hold on to in that conversation, I think, is the most important now.

This is a much bigger movement than just sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is the by-product of a system that failed women a long time ago. I remember when we had our first daughter, we read this article somewhere. I think they interviewed a hundred girls who had graduated college and gotten, quote, "good jobs," whatever that means. They asked them about the relationship between their father and their mother. Ninety-six percent of the girls had had fathers present. And there was this weird statistic — I'm probably getting it completely wrong — but there was some version of 86 percent of love and affection comes from the mother and 93 percent of confidence and conviction comes from the father. Meaning no matter how loving the mothers were, in this study, somehow these girls knew that if they did something great, they looked to their father and said, "Wasn't that a great game?" or "Didn't I do well on that test?" To me it meant there is something subconscious from the moment women are born that they have to fight an uphill battle that men don't.

The sexual-harassment stuff is the disgusting by-product that is shaking people up and making people awake, but I hope we don't stop there. I hope we have 50 percent women in the workplace in power positions. I think it's a conversation about power more than anything else. To me, that's what's so palpably powerful. It's not as a father of two daughters or the husband of a wife who's a strong feminist woman in the business. It's as a human being. I think it's a human-being level that we should all be talking about. I hope this is just the pulling back of the curtain, and once we see the wizard, we get to dismantle him and rebuild it and live in the kingdom we want to live in. The problem is the system is very old, so the dismantling process is going to take a while.

Just being a good person is really all we should be striving for, because that's how anything will get done.

PLAYBOY: So what can men do to help make that happen? What *should* they do?

KRASINSKI: Well, if you're a male CEO and you don't harass people, don't pat yourself on the back. Get other people to be more like you. I will say, I was raised in a very old ideal of America. Like, my dad told me to help your neighbour no matter what. You don't hold a vig against them. You just help if you can. I held doors for women. I called my father-in-law before I married Emily. It wasn't a decision for me. It was a foregone conclusion. I think more people need to have the foregone-conclusion version of treating women equally. Women *are* treated equally rather than women *should* be treated equally. I just read an article where some woman — it might have been [*Wonder Woman* director] Patty Jenkins — got an award, and they said, "You're the first woman to blah-blah-blah. How does that feel?" And she said, "It feels weird because you're still singling out that I'm a woman." I think that's the best answer you can have. I hope really soon that we get to the place where you just directed a good movie, you just ran a great company, you're a perfect candidate politically. No division, you know what I mean? We really should have been here a long time ago. ■

CHARLOTTE
WITHROW
ARTHUR ST.
KELLY MADUNA
DAMIAN SANTANA
MARCH 19

do you enjoy most?

favourite music artists?
mberlake, Imagine Dragons and

ch or the pool?

Mac or PC?
I'm a bit of a

What is your dream car?
a black

What is your favourite body part on you?
and

a wife, a mother, business woman, and model how do you manage it all and keep your sanity?
lot and do my fair share of work on the
kids! Ha

You're on the cover of Playboy Australia, congratulations! Have you ever been to Australia? If not, would you like to visit?
Thank you! It's an honour! haven't visited Australia but I've always wanted to down under!

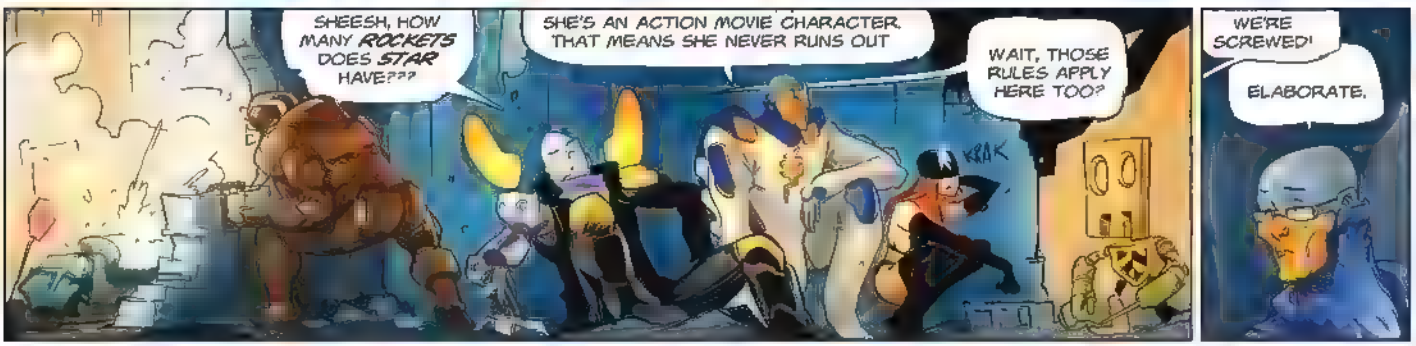
Most people are afraid to fly in a plane, you're studying to be a pilot! Tell us about that.
I have recently started flying lessons and absolutely love the feeling of freedom licensed pilot by the summer.

As of this point in your life, do you have any regrets?
Not really. Everything I've done in my life has gotten me to where I am in life today which I'm grateful for! It has made me the strong, confident learn!

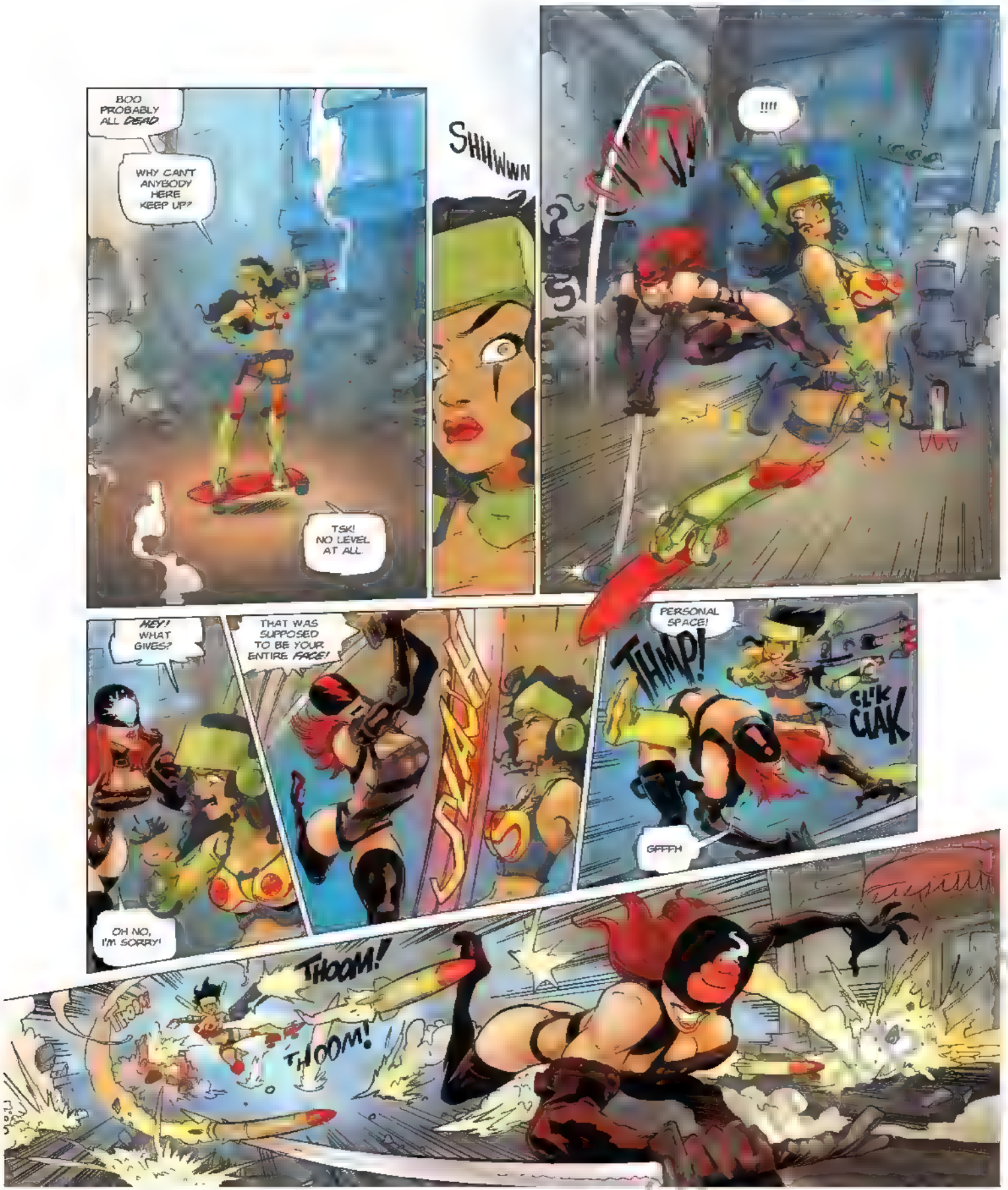
What is something about you that would like to change?
I'm pretty and would like to be more sociable. I'm told I can be very intimidating. It's definitely not by choice. I would like to be more approachable to people.

You're an inspiration to many, but we would like to know what inspires you?
What inspires me is loyalty and integrity. Today so many people have no problem hurting others, turning their backs on those in need, and struggle being true to themselves. I find inspiration in people who do the right thing. I believe there is still good in the world.

IN THE FUTURE, DRUGS HAVE RENDERED SLEEP UNNECESSARY
BUT IN THE DREAMVERSE, WHERE OUR MINIMUM WAGE HEROES
WORK TO STOP DREAM BEINGS FROM BECOMING REAL,
ONE OF THOSE CREATIONS STAR S ON A RAMPAGE
STORY: MARITZA CAMPOS ART: BACHAN
POWERNAP
WHERE YOU HIDIN'?
COME OUT, YER GONNA LIKE IT!
BOOM
BOOM
PROMISE!
KER BOOM!

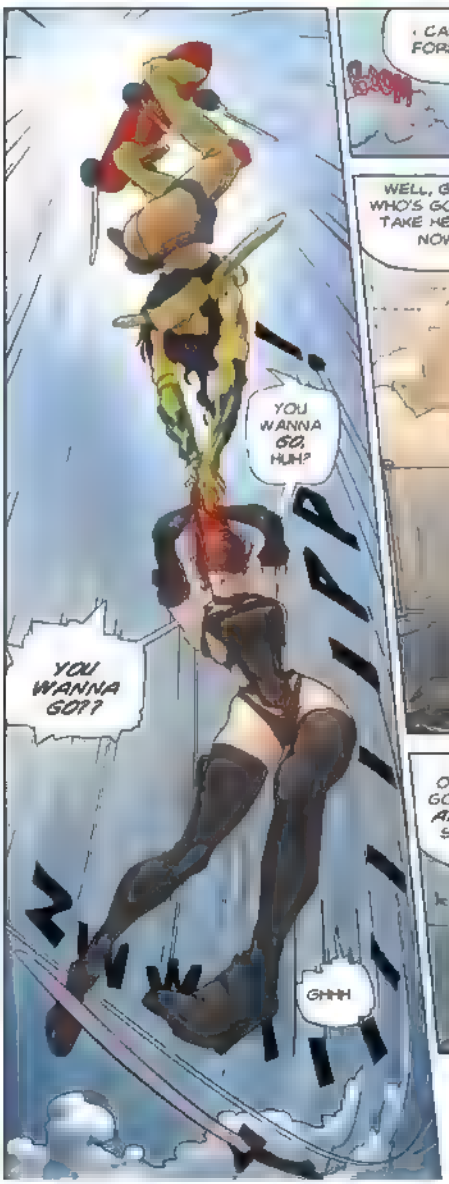

SHEESH, HOW MANY ROCKETS DOES STAR HAVE???
SHE'S AN ACTION MOVIE CHARACTER. THAT MEANS SHE NEVER RUNS OUT
WAIT, THOSE RULES APPLY HERE TOO?
KRAK
WE'RE SCREWED!
ELABORATE.

YOU MEAN YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE MOVIES? SHE'S BASICALLY INVINCIBLE! LIKE BUGS BUNNY OR CHUCK NORRIS!
I PREFER HISTORICAL DRAMAS.
SHE'S LIKE... THE DAUGHTER OF AN AZTEC GOD AND STUFF!
WE SHOULD SEND THE EXPERT TO DEAL WITH HER.
NOPE!
WELL, DON'T LOOK AT ME, I'M USELESS.
YEAH, KAFKA. WHY DON'T YOU SUMMON GODZILLA OR SOMETHING?
SORRY, ALL I CAN THINK ABOUT AT THIS MOMENT IS LINGERIE.
I SHOULD USE MY CHARMS ON HER. I HEARD SHE'S VULNERABLE TO THAT.
OH GOD, WE'RE GONNA DIE!
WHY ARE WE DEALING WITH STAR ANYWAY?
APPARENTLY, SHE CROSSED OVER TO THE REAL WORLD AND BURNED THREE NUNNERIES TO THE GROUND.
HEY, WHERE'S TOKEN?


BOO PROBABLY ALL DEAD.
WHY CAN'T ANYBODY HERE KEEP UP?
TSK! NO LEVEL AT ALL.
SHHWWN
!!!!
HEY! WHAT GIVES?
THAT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE YOUR ENTIRE FACE!
SMASH
PERSONAL SPACE!
THMP!
CLIK CLAK
GFFFH
OH NO, I'M SORRY!
THOOM!
THOOM!
THOOM

DON'T BRING A KATANA TO A ROCKET FIGHT

HI.
SONORA..!!!
SQUISH


YOU WANNA GO, HUH?
YOU WANNA GO??
GHHH

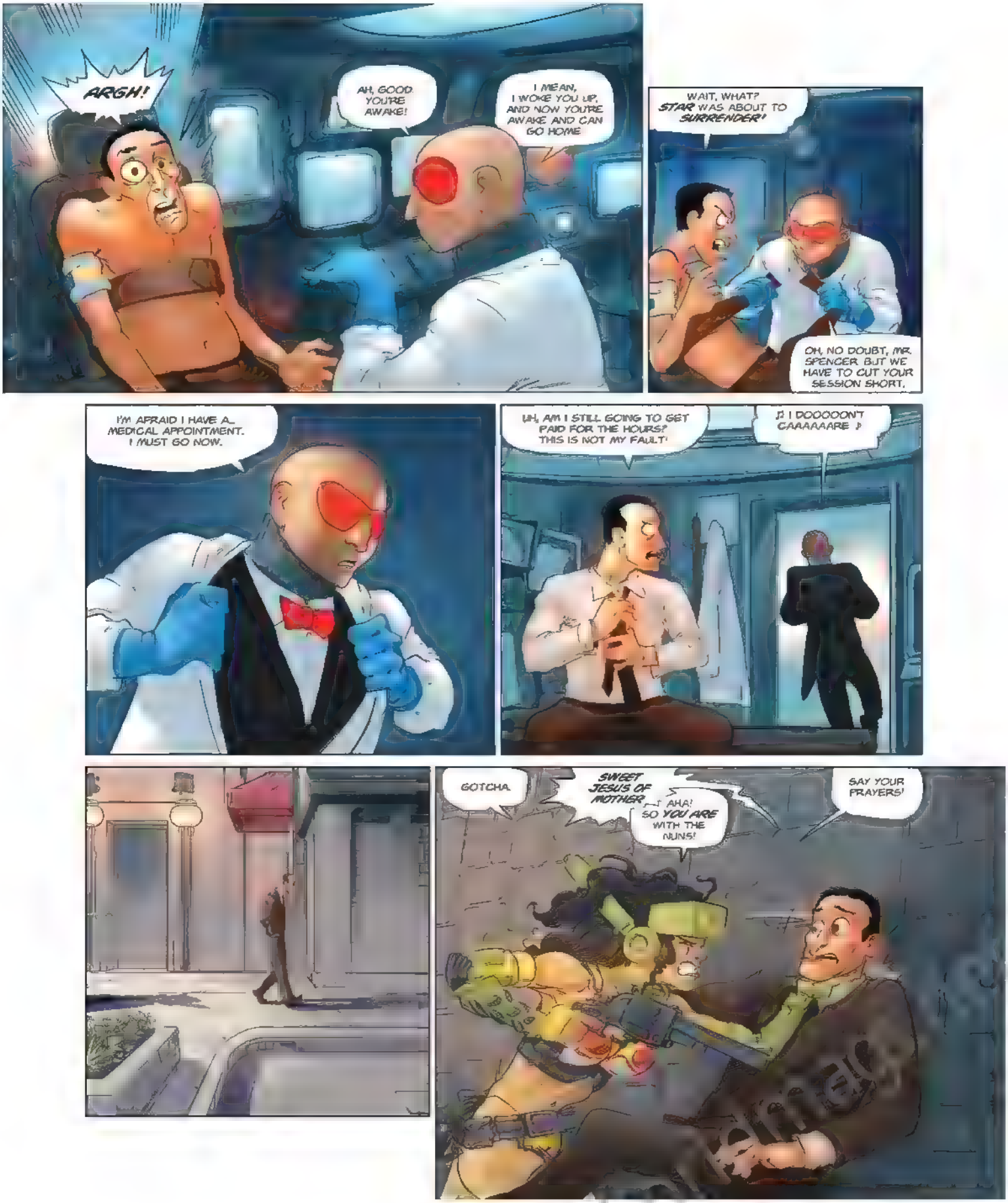
I CAN SEE FOREVER.
CRACK
BOOM
ARGH!
CRUNCH

WELL, GREAT WHO'S GOING TO TAKE HER OUT NOW?
YOU DO IT! YOU'RE THE EXPEEEERT!
HEY, IF THE EXPERT IS KILLED, WHO'S GONNA BE THE NEW EXPERT?
MAYBE YOU'LL FIND AN ANGLE WE CAN'T SEE.

THE ONLY "ANGLE" I'M GONNA SEE S THE ATOMIC WEDGIE SHE S GOING TO GIVE ME
KAFKA WILL SEND YOU SOMETHING.
ME WHO WHAT?

Wortal.net

UH... HI?
THE NUNS SENT YOU, DIDN'T THEY??
NO, NO, NO. DON'T DO THAT! LOOK. LOOK.
WE'RE GOING TO TRY AND MAKE THIS EASY FOR YOU, OKAY?
YOU CAN JUST...
SURRENDER NOW.
OH, THAT'S A NEW ONE, ALL RIGHT.
NOOO, I MEAN IT! I KNOW I LOOK HARMLESS, BUT BELIEVE ME, I CAN TOTALLY KILL YOU WITH MY HUMONGOUS LETHAL GUN.
ANY
MINUTE.
NOW
SIGH FINE.
TOLD YA.

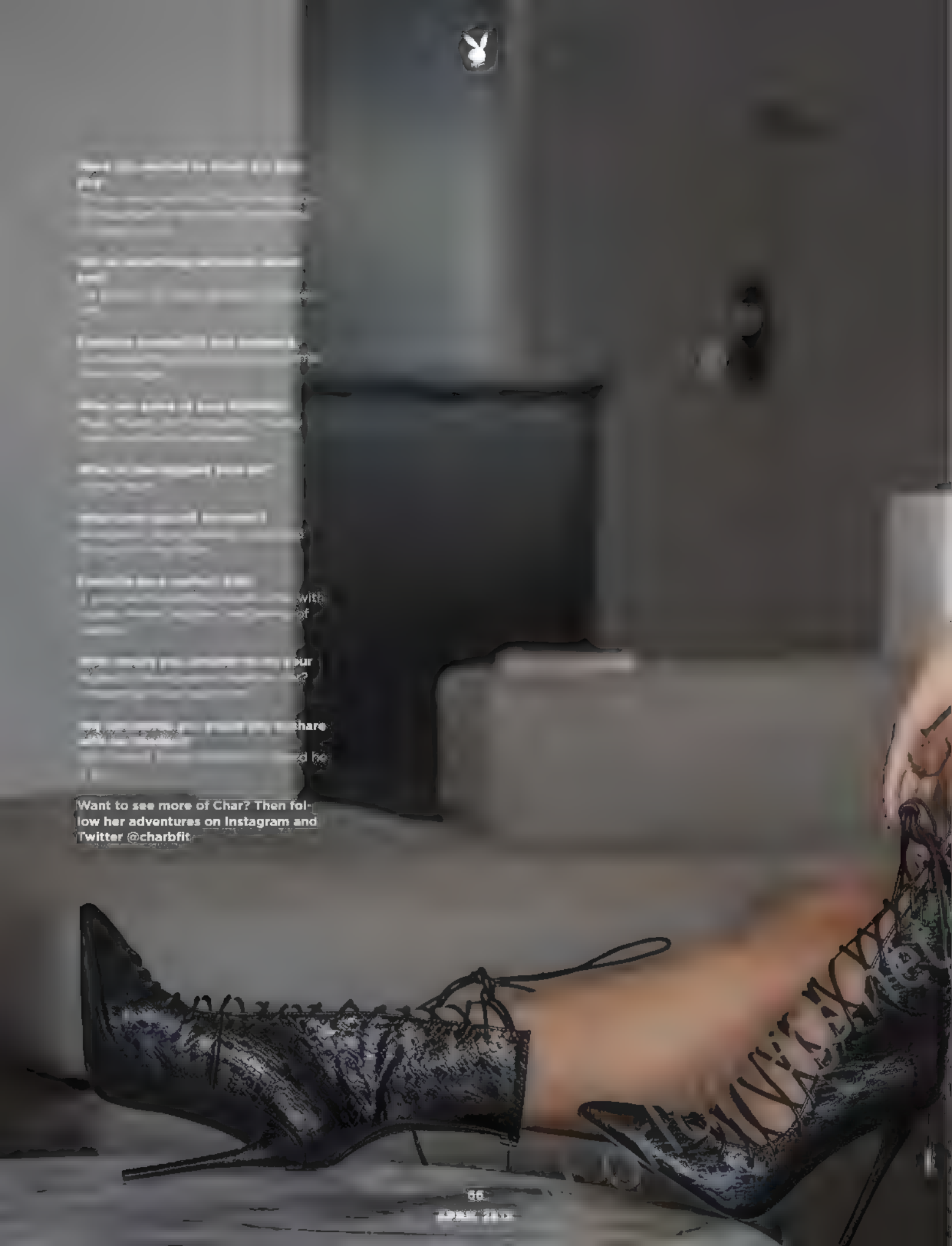

ARGH!
AH, GOOD YOU'RE AWAKE!
I MEAN, I WOKE YOU UP, AND NOW YOU'RE AWAKE AND CAN GO HOME
WAIT, WHAT? STAR WAS ABOUT TO SURRENDER!
OH, NO DOUBT, MR. SPENCER. BUT WE HAVE TO CUT YOUR SESSION SHORT.
I'M AFRAID I HAVE A... MEDICAL APPOINTMENT. I MUST GO NOW.
UH, AM I STILL GOING TO GET PAID FOR THE HOURS? THIS IS NOT MY FAULT!
♫ I DOOOOON'T CAAAAAARE ♪
GOTCHA.
SWEET JESUS OF MOTHER—
AHA! SO YOU ARE WITH THE NUNS!
SAY YOUR PRAYERS!

WAIT, WAIT! DID YOU KNOW A.R.M.O.R. IS GOING TO BE DISBANDED BY THE GOVERNMENT SOON AND YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO GO ROGUE?
YEH, NICE TRY, SHOE-FACE.
IT'S TRUE! YOU CAN CHECK IT, THEY LEAKED THE SCRIPT ONLINE!
GGGK
WAIT, WHAT??? WHO'S GONNA PAY ME, THEN??
EXACTLY.
GREAT, WHAT THE HECK AM I SUPPOSED TO DO NOW?
I DUNNO...
MAYBE... WE COULD CATCH A MOVIE?
SNRKH
FOR MORE ADVENTURES IN SLEEP DEPRIVATION, VISIT POWERNAPCOMIC.COM.

Char Borley

PEDRO ROLLE JR JEFF MADDUX

PLAYMATE



Want to see more of Char? Then follow her adventures on Instagram and Twitter @charbfit

PLAYMATE

PLAYMATE
APRIL 2010

APRIL 2018

GO, SPACE RACER!
Unscripted! Raw! Rocketship rivalry! Reality TV takes to the cosmos

By **CURTIS C CHEN**

I should have fought harder on the title of my real-vid series. The glittering, animated logo declaring *Space Race. Kat's Chase* is driving me crazy, always twirling in the corner of the live-stream from *Hawk Five*. On the bright side, the visual pollution does help distract me from my living situation tiny habitat pod, stale recycled air, chilly and cramped. Physical discomfort is a trifle when compared to this constant, insulting eyesore.

I don't even *like* glitter.

Could have been worse, though. Signing off on that dumb title meant I didn't have to wear the bikini that wardrobe very generously called a "flight suit." I may be stranded, but at least I'm wearing enough fabric to cover my entire body. It's been averaging 60 below zero outside, and the pod's heaters are working full-time to keep me alive.

It's true, *Kat's Chase* did make me — Katrina Shao — a household name overnight. But I never cared about being famous. If anyone should be famous, it's Beatrice Soltana. And she will be. Oh, the irony.

• • •

I didn't know her name at first. For weeks before the race started, she was just "the third Lunar ship," and that was enough. I didn't want to know any of my competitors too well and risk actually caring about them.

My first sight of Beatrice's ship was a vid from an Earth telescope, when Jayden — oh boy, Jayden, that's a whole other story — asked me to comment on the vehicle configuration. We'd been doing this with all the other racers, me wanting to drop some science education on my viewers, Jayden just encouraging me to trash-talk my competition. After several dozen of these "design reviews," it was starting to get old. But then I saw the rock-ship.

Lunar Three wasn't built for looks. Not like my sleek, sexy Hawk Five, which had been focus-grouped to death before construction. Beatrice's ride was a hodgepodge of half a strip-mined asteroid, solar panels jutting out at seemingly random angles, and habitat and engine modules held in place by melted rock flows. There's no need for aerodynamic vehicles when you live in hard vacuum. I was fascinated. And we got two whole episodes out of Zaprudering those long-distance views of her ship.

I was so focused on the hardware, I didn't realise what Jayden was doing to my ship's software. I'd gotten used to just accepting every boring update patch from Earth. And why wouldn't I trust my own producer and ex-lover?

He knew Beatrice's ship was close enough to intercept my transmissions back to Earth. He knew she wouldn't be able to resist eavesdropping on my raw feed when she realised the stream was using an outdated encryption key. And he guessed — correctly — that she wouldn't immediately check the video data for an embedded Trojan designed to infiltrate her ship's computer, because my outlandish speculations about her spacecraft design would be too annoying for her to ignore.

While I explained that one of Beatrice's hab modules could be a hydroponics bubble, the secondary comms display next to my camera lit up. I was hanging upside down at the time — viewers love stupid zero-gravity tricks — and I had to rotate the screen to read her message.

ARE YOU GIVING DELIBERATE MISINFORMATION OR JUST STUPID THAT'S MY WATER CYCLE REPRESS GET IT RIGHT OR SHUT UP

I was a little surprised, thinking she had hacked my comms, but actually felt flattered that she'd gone to the trouble. After finishing my broadcast, I messaged her back.

IF YOU CARE SO MUCH WHY NOT SEND ME SOME BLUEPRINTS? SHE REPLIED. SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT YOUR OWN PORN

That was confusing. GET YOUR MIND OUT OF THE GUTTER. WHO SAID ANYTHING ABOUT PORN?

YOU SAID "BLUEPRINTS," ISN'T THAT SLANG FOR DIRTY PICTURES?

SCHEMATICS! I MEANT SCHEMATICS OF YOUR SHIP

OH WELL MY ANSWER IS STILL NO

It was the funniest thing I'd experienced in weeks.

After two days of cajoling, she agreed to talk to me on a live vid link — off the record, of course. I understood her reluctance, and it took a lot of work to convince her, but I was just so bored. I didn't think I'd feel so lonely, with half the Solar System watching me. But having an audience isn't the same as having friends.

"So how many markers have you tagged today?" I asked. Finding the radio beacons hidden around the asteroid belt was by far the most challenging part of Space Race.

Beatrice scowled at me. She was lean and dark, with short-cropped hair. "Not-gonna tell you, Earther." Her voice lilted as her Lunar accent ran words together and emphasised the wrong syllables.

"Come on, I'm not asking you where you found them," I said. "Just give me a number. I'm curious."

She stared at me, then said, "Twelve more today. You?"

I did my best to hide my surprise. The scoreboard had shown me in the lead yesterday, but if she was telling the truth, I was now down by four.

"Not quite that many," I said. "But I'm right on your ass, Bea. Don't get cocky."

"Your trajectories are inefficient," she said. "Perhaps your sensors are also inadequate."

I folded my arms. "I spent six years at Caltech designing deep-space probes. I'm pretty sure I know what I'm doing."

"I grew up on Luna," she said, as if that were an equivalent credential.

"Right," I said. "That would explain the poor social skills."

"We value privacy. I do not understand how you can do your stupid show."

"I'm sorry, do you mean the top-rated real-vid series Space Race: Kat's Chase? I do it because they're paying the bills. Who are your sponsors?" I hadn't seen any logos adorning her rock-ship, but I could understand brands not wanting to be associated with that monstrosity.

"I'm independent."

"Sitting on a nice trust fund, were you?"

"I don't know what that is."

Now I'm frowning. "How did you pay for your ship?"

"That's private."

"Really. Tell me again how your great respect for privacy led you to hack into my communications?"

She gave me a funny look. "You're beaming signal straight-at-me with old cyphers. It's almost like you were asking me to eavesdrop."

I kept a poker face while cursing on the inside. "Well, you know. Good science is all about sharing information."

"Very well," Beatrice said. "Why don't you share your next destination with me?"

I was tempted for a split second — Let's make an actual race of it! — but then I remembered I was behind by four markers. "I thought I was inefficient."

"I just wanted to beat you there and prove it."

Not a chance, Lunar. "Oh, hey, look at the time. It's been real, Bea, but I gotta go do my show. Peace." I didn't wait for her to respond before clicking off.

• • •

I never wanted to compete in Space Race. It always seemed like just another way to churn content for advertising overlays. But after six years of expensive higher education, I was running out of grants for post-graduate studies and my job prospects were non-existent.

Then Jayden — stupid, sexy Jayden, who had already talked me into sharing a bed and then an apartment, and was already getting hefty employment offers straight out of film school — suggested I look into Space Race.

Space Race is officially known as the Gaveshana Spacefaring Foundation Stock Propulsion Time Trial. Once every 10 years, the foundation supplies 100 identical spacecraft engine systems and runs a lottery to pick 100 qualified pilots, who build the best vehicles they can around each engine, within very strict mass limits. Then Gaveshana makes those pilots run their spacecraft ragged around the asteroid belt until one comes out on top.

But win or lose, you got to keep your engine. That was a golden ticket out of Earth's gravity well.

Every other door was being slammed in my face. Space Race was the only game in town that didn't care about your background, as long as you passed all the written tests and qualified in the simulator. Everything was anonymised, colour blind, as purely merit-based as the foundation could make it. Anyone in the Solar System was welcome to try out. The sponsors just wanted some gating factors to minimise the chances that you would get yourself killed.

I didn't really expect to qualify. I don't know what I scored on the exams. I don't know how many other people were in the drawing. All I know is, my lottery number was selected on a live vid broadcast, and the next day I was accepting delivery of my very own Erickson Exotech power plant.

And literally five minutes after that, Hollywood called.

Nobody races without some kind of financial backing. Building a spaceship is a pricey proposition. But the fewer backers you have, the less time you need to spend reassuring each one that you're doing the right thing every step of the way. Jayden convinced me that we were being smart, signing with Quantum Sheep Entertainment — he would be hired as my producer, and we'd be dealing with only one corporate entity for any ancillary rights and sublicensing deals. QSE's studios were even nearby, right in Pasadena.

With built-in cachet as the youngest Space Race competitor and the only woman pilot from Earth, all I had to do was smile for the cameras and let QSE turn my life into whatever narrative they thought would get the most eyeballs. What's the old proverb? "Can't shake the devil's hand and say you're only kidding."

• • •

As soon as I clicked off with Bea, I recorded a profanity-laden vid in which I told Jayden exactly what I thought of him messing with my ship's communications software. Unfortunately, I didn't have the expertise to undo his latest patch, so all I could do was yell into a camera lens.

His reply to me — which came long after I had time to cool me — which typical Jayden, soothing apology sliding into empty promises. I knew he was lying through his perfect teeth, but I could never resist those twinkling eyes. And I still needed him to produce my show.

There ought to also be a proverb about sleeping with the devil, because I've found that generally doesn't work out well either.

I should have suspected something when Jayden asked me to open my next show with yet another visual assessment of *Lunar Three's* exterior. He fed me some line about getting an actual thruster count, since the rock-ship's engines were hidden in shadowed nooks and crannies, and this upcoming retro burn could be my last chance to see them.

"Keep your friends close and your enemies closer, right?" he said with a wink. I gave in.

It was day seven, and only 19 racers were still competing. Beatrice and I were in a dead heat for first place. We had each verified 80 markers on the scoreboard — more than any past winners — and now we had to start thinking about getting to the finish line. If we ended up tied on markers, we'd be judged by how much mass we had burned during the race, and that was secret information. Saving fuel might be more important at this point.

Both *Hawk Five* and *Lunar Three* were nearing a large asteroid that we could use as a gravity slingshot to accelerate out of the belt. Beatrice had crept to within five kilometres of me — closer than safety guidelines recommended, but she was one heck of a pilot. Not that I would ever admit it to her face. Or on camera.

I knew something was wrong when I saw Beatrice in her spacesuit, crawling around the outside of her main reactor's heat sink. I tried to raise her on comms, but she didn't respond.

The explosion would have blinded me if my screen hadn't auto-polarised, blotting out the brightest portion of the blast with a shivering black circle. I blinked away tears and read my other instruments, checking for stray debris that might collide with *Hawk*.

"Confirmed. *Lunar Three* is completely destroyed," I heard myself saying. "My readings indicate there was a power surge that caused an overload …"

Except that's impossible, I thought. The power plant wouldn't have gone critical, the fail-safes would have shut it down. I know this engine inside and out.

And so does Jayden.

I reviewed my communication logs as soon as the broadcast ended. I found the computer virus signature after scrolling back to my first tight-beam chat with Beatrice. It was hidden in the data stream, and only one person could have put it there. Jayden.

I couldn't even have a proper shouting match with him, since it took a full hour for my messages to reach Earth and another hour

PILOTS RUN THEIR SPACECRAFT RAGGED AROUND THE ASTEROID BELT UNTIL ONE COMES OUT ON TOP.

147 for me to receive any reply. But I unloaded every swear word I knew and threatened to turn him in to the authorities. He reminded me why I couldn't.

"All your comms go through my control room," Jayden said, a crocodile smile smearing across his too-smooth face. "Look, it was an accident. I didn't mean to blow up the ship. I just wanted to cause some engine trouble, slow her down and give you a little advantage."

"I don't need your help, assh#le," I sent back. "And *I'm* the one in control. I can turn off every camera in here and kill the show."

"You stop the cameras, you're in breach of contract," Jayden said. "Come on. I'm *helping* here. I've been reading up on the competition, and all you joystick jockeys have the same blind spot: software. That's my specialty. Magic fingers, remember?" He held up both hands, palms toward himself, and wiggled his fingers. It had seemed cute once, but now it made my skin crawl. "Bottom line, you're in the lead now, and your top priority is winning this race. Nothing else matters until you're back on that carrier. Jayden out."

I wanted to put my fist through his head, but I couldn't. Instead, I put on a spacesuit, went outside—we already had plenty of B-roll footage of me doing all kinds of EVA, so I was safe from the cameras for at least a few minutes—and turned off my radio and screamed into the void until I was hoarse.

I had no warning when Beatrice crashed into me from behind.

• • •

Gaveshana's rules for Space Race are simple: one person per spacecraft, stock propulsion system, overall vehicle mass limit, first pilot to rendezvous with the most rally markers and then cross the finish line in time wins. No resupply during transit, no support vehicles, no remote power except for solar panels. If something goes wrong during Space Race, you fix it yourself. If you can't fix it, you're done. It's a test of skill, endurance and more than a little luck.

This decade's course was the most challenging to date: Starting at the Lagrangian point ahead of Mars in its orbit around the Sun, each racer had just 10 solar days to search the asteroid belt for 100 scattered short-range radio-markers, then navigate back out to the Lagrangian point trailing Mars. The Gaveshana carrier from which we launched would take a leisurely trip around the Mars quarantine zone to meet us at the finish line.

During the race, I would stream uninterrupted raw vid back to Earth for Team Kat to edit into daily broadcasts. This was a bit of an innovation on Jayden's part: Most racers jealously guarded their methods, but I wasn't planning to make a career of this. I had no problem kissing and telling, as long as it didn't handicap my performance. I still wanted to win.

The first five days saw nearly half the starting racers either drop out, burn out or simply go missing. There's a lot of empty space out here to get lost in. And one of the Venus flyers deployed a whole fleet of decoy radio drones in the first hour. It wasn't technically against the rules—they weren't directly interfering with anyone's navigation systems—and a lot of racers ended up chasing the wrong radar blips.

Beatrice and I both had state-of-the-art passive sensors and signal-processing computers—systems that less prudent pilots might have skimped on—and were able to pick out the genuine markers from the fake ones. We flew in meandering paths, so no one else could follow us easily, but kept ending up at the same rocks. It was unavoidable: You add two and two and you're going to get four, no matter what kind of calculator you're using.

• • •

Beatrice's inertia toppled us both forward, but my safety tether kept us from drifting away. I spent a few seconds wrestling uselessly in zero gravity, until she clanged her spacesuit helmet against mine. Her voice vibrated through our touching visors.

"Permission to come aboard," she said.

"Beatrice!" I shouted. "You're .. but, how?"

"Opened exterior access right-before reactor blew," she said. "Hull panel separated and shielded me from the blast. Big-rock's gravity pulled me in, and suit-jets had just enough juice to manoeuvre to you. Glad you didn't change course."

"You're alive!" I laughed and slapped her shoulder. She wasn't smiling. "Oh God, I'm so sorry about your ship. It wasn't—I mean, I didn't..."

She nodded, her lips a tight line. "I know."

Dammit. Jayden had never re-encrypted my comms. Beatrice must have seen our entire shouting match.

"He's a slimeball," I didn't even want to say his name. "But I'll make sure he faces the music."

"How?"

"One thing at a time. Let's go inside. We need to show everyone you're alive."

She shook her head. "Heck no. I don't want to be on TV."

The privacy thing again. "You can't stay out here."

"I'd rather stay here than be on your show."

"Always nice to meet a fan," I grumbled. "Fine. I'll go in first, smash the camera in the airlock, and you can hang out there. But *Hawk* isn't built for two people. We need to send a distress call so someone can come rescue you."

"There's no one in range."

I was getting angry now. "Fine! Then I need your help to get *both* of us to the finish line in *this* ship!"

She shook her head. "That may not be possible." "It's just a stupid engineering problem," I said. "We'll find a solution. Let's go inside and we'll figure it out."

• • •

There was another surprise waiting for us inside *Hawk Five*: an alert from Gaveshana cancelling Space Race.

They had located one of the missing racers. Apparently he had convinced himself that several markers were hidden inside a passing comet and gotten stupid in his excitement. He had misjudged his approach and crashed through the comet, breaking it into pieces and deflecting it from its original orbit. Now there was a huge slew of ice and rock headed toward our finish line.

The cometary debris field was too massive for Gaveshana to clear. The carrier had to change course to avoid deadly collisions, which meant all racers had to chase it to its new position if we wanted to catch our ride back to Earth. This wasn't a contest anymore. This was life or death. Gaveshana would stay out here as long as they could, but they wouldn't risk an entire carrier for 19 unlucky pilots.

Like every Space Race vehicle, *Hawk* was designed to support a single human pilot. Beatrice and I could stretch our oxygen with recyclers, and ration food and water for the next few days, but we just didn't have enough fuel to push our increased mass to the carrier's new flight path before our supplies ran out. We were going to miss the mark by several orders of magnitude.

"It's time for the distress call," I said after we had spent an hour running simulations and mainlining instant-coffee bulbs. "QSE has a whole team of consultants on retainer back on Earth. Maybe they'll think of something we missed."

"Ask them about Mars," Beatrice said.

I frowned at her. "The what, now?"

She surprised me by pushing herself out of the airlock and floating over to me. She handed me the tablet she'd been using. It showed a new flight plan: Instead of thrusting toward the Lagrangian point, she had *Hawk* diverting into Mars's orbit and slingshotting around the planet. We still didn't make it to the carrier, but we got a lot closer. Close enough for rescue.

"If we jettison some nonessential hardware as reaction mass," she said, "we may be able to achieve a high orbit, above the fenceposts."

The Mars terraforming quarantine was enforced by an orbital grid of "fencepost" satellites that would sterilise — that is, burn with high-powered lasers until nothing organic could survive any spacecraft attempting to land on the planet. It was going to take a long time to reshape the environment to allow human habitation, and even a few of the wrong microbes could set the project back by decades. Ares Amalgamated wasn't going to let that happen.

"This is kind of completely insane," I told her.

Beatrice shrugged. "Go big or go home."

"All right, Bea!" I gave her a friendly punch on the shoulder.

She gave me a dirty look. "Please don't do that again."

"Sorry." I prepared to record a vid message. "But since you've overcome your stage fright, do you want to present this ludicrous scheme yourself?"

"Heck no." She pushed herself away and drifted back into the airlock. "I don't know those people."

"Right." I switched on the camera. Imagining the look on Jayden's face put a big grin on my own. "Surprise, team! Look who's joined me aboard the Hawk Five. It's Beatrice Soltana from the Moon, and we have a very interesting math problem for you."

• • •

Jayden's initial response was not exactly what I expected.

"This is great!" he gushed. "We thought we'd have to cancel the show after that alert, but this is brilliant. You're not just trying to win a race now. You're both fighting for your lives!"

He went on for a while, explaining how QSE wanted us to record new promotional footage and schedule exclusive interviews with news outlets. I ignored all that and sent our trajectory calculations for a double-check by the mission control engineers. If Hawk couldn't detour around Mars, viewer counts would be the least of our worries.

It would take no less than two hours to get a reply from Earth, including the transmission delay and at least one emergency all-hands meeting. Normally I'd have been bored stupid, but now I had someone to talk to. Even if she was a weirdo Lunar who insisted on running words together for no apparent reason.

"So tell me, Bea," I said, "what made you want to enter this race?"

"Cribbage," she said.

"Come again?"

"Come where?"

I shook my head. "Just repeat what you said."

Crib-something?"

"Cribbage. It's a card game. Don't you know it?"

"I'm not really into gambling."

She looked offended. "It's not gambling. It's math and patterns. Easy fun. I'll show you." She unzipped one of her jumpsuit pockets and pulled out a deck of old-fashioned playing cards.

"So do you always carry those with you, or...?"

"Good-luck charm. Now shut up and learn."

• • •

Jayden was considerably less happy the next time we heard from him. So was I, having lost the First Interplanetary Invitational Cribbage Tournament by several hundred points.

"We need your new best friend to sign some releases before we can put her on the air," Jayden grumbled into the camera. "The eggheads are working on a flight plan. We'll get you that update in a few hours. But we need Bea's contract back as soon as possible. We still got a show to make, Kat." His transmission ended with an attached bolus of legal documents.

"What does this mean?" Beatrice asked me. "It means you're going to be famous," I said, paging through her contract. "And they're going to pay you. Not as much as me, of course..."

"I don't want to be on TV," she said, pushing away from me.

"You do realise we've been streaming vid this whole time, right? They've already got you on camera."

"They cannot legally broadcast that footage unless I agree," Beatrice said. "And I will not sign the release forms."

I stared at her. QSE's bean counters wouldn't commit resources to our rescue unless they could milk maximum profit from the show, and people weren't going to tune in for less than full high-def vid of both Beatrice and me. That was the only thing the studio cared about, in the end: whether they could sell more advertising. And ads work only if people are watching.

Can't shake the devil's hand and say you're only kidding.

I wouldn't be able to convince Beatrice. I saw it in her stubborn Lunar face; I knew it from her born-and-bred Lunar attitude toward respecting personal boundaries. And even if by some miracle she did sign, I didn't want her distracted by thinking about the billions of people watching her every move.

I had no idea how Beatrice might react to being under that kind of public scrutiny. I couldn't have her freaking out. I needed her expertise. I needed her to focus on our problem.

Focus.

"Don't worry," I said. "You don't have to sign anything."

• • •

Nobody was happy with my solution. I suppose that made it the perfect compromise. Jayden wasn't happy about all the extra editing to blur out Beatrice's face wherever it appeared on camera and disguise her voice whenever she spoke. I had to catch myself or record multiple takes more than once to avoid using her name. And Beatrice wasn't happy that some parts of her body would still appear in the broadcast.

But she was on my ship. Beatrice had yielded any right to privacy when she boarded, for as long as she stayed. The show's ratings spiked as fans circulated all kinds of theories about

THIS WASN'T A CONTEST ANYMORE. THIS WAS LIFE OR DEATH. AND ONE OF US WAS GOING TO DIE.

who my mystery guest was. Meanwhile, we had even bigger problems

"The numbers don't look good," said Team Kat's chief engineer, Dima, in our latest message from Earth. "*Hawk* requires course correction for a proper insertion orbit around Mars, but you can't spare the fuel — you'll need that later. So we have a new procedure. It requires you to manually jettison reaction mass. Here's a list of the equipment onboard you need to collect for disposal."

Text scrolled across the bottom of the screen, listing all the hardware we'd have to dump. My stomach knotted. It was an awfully long list.

"But given the limited velocity you'll be able to impart manually, that's still not enough mass," Dima continued. "You will also need to remove some sections of the outer hull."

"Are you kidding me?" I blurted.

"...but don't worry, it's perfectly safe."

Dima attempted to smile, which only made it worse. "We'll leave the forward sections intact just in case you run into any dust or debris. There will only be cosmetic modifications to the back half of the ship."

"Where the actual engines are!" I said out loud.

"We've run several simulations," Dima said.

"You don't have a lot of margin for error, so be very precise when you're ejecting the mass. The procedure document is attached. Let us know if you have any questions or concerns."

"'If'?" Beatrice said from behind me. "Pasadena out." I recorded a response for air, putting on my best intrepid-explorer face, praising my support team and expressing supreme confidence in their abilities. After that was done, I turned to Beatrice and said, "We are so going to die."

• • •

Maybe mission control's plan wasn't completely insane, but they didn't have to stand on *Hawk*'s hull and look into her bare metal guts after stripping the ceramic covering off her amidships and aft sections. It was unnerving to know that a good third of our spacecraft would be unarmored as we ploughed into Mars's upper atmosphere.

And then there was the kicking. I'm sure we looked ridiculous out there, me with my back against the hull, holding on with both arms outstretched, kicking objects away from Hawk as hard as I could. Beatrice crouched next to me and moved each piece into place against my boots until we had jettisoned every last gram we could spare.

We went back inside, and I watched over Beatrice's shoulder while she ran the numbers again. Either one of us could have done it, but she was faster. I guess growing up in the Moon's lower gravity really had given her better instincts for flight mechanics.

The news was bad. *Hawk* was still coming in too steep. We were going to cross the fenceposts surrounding Mars, and they would melt us into an inert mass before we touched the surface of the planet. There was no escape from our fate.

Escape.

"How much mass do we still need to lose?" I asked.

"By kicking?" Beatrice shook her head. "Too much. We can't spare any more consumables, and there's not much of the hull left. You're strong, Kat, but you're only human. We just can't get enough momentum."

I tapped some numbers into the console. "What if we could eject this much mass... at *this* velocity?"

Beatrice blinked at the screen, then looked at me. "How?"

"The escape pod," I said. "It has explosive bolts to push away from the spacecraft, just in case I'm running from an engine overload or something. Those numbers are just a ballpark, we'll need to verify them."

"You wanna eject me," Beatrice said.

"No," I said. "We launch the pod empty. We're in this together, Bea."

• • •

We got so caught up in the work, we didn't even think to give mission control an update on our situation. This was probably a good thing: We wouldn't have wanted their pitiless input on this new dilemma.

The escape pod by itself didn't have enough mass to complete our course correction. One of us had to be inside. And given the velocity of the pyro charges, *Hawk* would have to eject her escape pod — with occupant — just as she hit the edge of Mars' atmosphere.

The pod would fall to the surface, through the fenceposts' no-fly zone.

One of us was going to die.

"I volunteer," Beatrice said.

"No," I snapped. "No. Let's check this again. If we change the angle and launch the pod earlier..."

"It's okay, Kat," Beatrice said. "I volunteer."

"No! There's got to be a way to make this work."

"It's okay," Beatrice repeated in that irritating singsong. "We have a phrase on Luna, *Hard math*. Facts are facts. Like in cribbage — don't have the right cards, you don't score. Numbers don't lie. Numbers don't care."

"This isn't about numbers!" I smacked the console. "And you can still mess up in cribbage if you don't see a pattern that's on the table." I had proven that repeatedly. "I'll call Jayden. Get QSE to pull some strings with Ares Amalgamated. They must be able to do a remote shutdown on those fenceposts."

"Ares-Am has invested trillions of dollars in creating a planetary habitat," Beatrice said. "You really think a corporation that size will care if two people live-or-die? We might have both died in the race anyway..."

"Shut up," I said. "I'm not listening to your fatalistic crap."

"You still have a chance to..."

"*La-la-la-la-la,*" I said, sticking fingers in both ears. "*I can't hear you.*"

I saw Beatrice's mouth moving and shook my head.

"*I am not receiving your signal,*" I shouted at her. "*Sensors are offline...*"

And then I had one last crazy idea.

"...important," Beatrice said as I opened my ears again. "Stop, Kat. Let me go."

I moved around her and started working the nav console again. "Bea. Question. How many meteors hit Mars every year?"

""Don't know. Why?"

"Just take a guess!"

She sighed. "Luna sees at least one meteoroid strike per day. Mars is a larger target, but its atmosphere shields it. I would guess one third as many impacts there. I'm sure Ares-Am has data from their sensors on the ground."

"Oh, I know they do," I said. "So why don't the fenceposts vaporise those meteors before they reach the surface?"

"Because they're not-spacecraft," Beatrice said. "And how do the fenceposts know they're not spacecraft?" "Because..." Beatrice blinked. "Humpme! Because meteors don't emit radio-waves."

"Give that girl a cigar," I said.

"I don't smoke."

"Forget it." The console lit up with the escape pod's engineering schematics, and I moved aside so Beatrice could see where I was pointing. "We disable the pod's nav beacon and the automated distress signal, here and here. It'll look like just another rock to the fenceposts. I'll survive reentry, and then..."

"Wait, stop." Beatrice held up a hand. "I should go. This is your ship."

"You grew up on the Moon," I said. "Mars' gravity is twice what your body can handle. Your lungs would collapse in less than a day."

Beatrice put a hand on my shoulder and spoke slowly. "This is *your* ship."

"That's right." I swallowed the lump in my throat. "I'm the captain, and I'm giving you an order. You're a better pilot than I'll ever be, Lunar. You get Hawk to the rendezvous. You get some help, and then you come back and rescue me."

Beatrice's eyes glistened. "Aye, captain."

"And this is still my ship," I said. "You're just borrowing her. Make sure you fill up the fuel tank before you return her."

Beatrice laughed, squeezing a tear out of one eye. I caught the droplet with my sleeve, soaking it up before it could drift away and into any equipment. "Your producer's not going to be happy about this."

"Screw him. He can suck it with a broken straw." I grabbed a tablet and scribbled down six words. "Here. You give him this message *after* you're safely aboard the carrier. Not before."

I handed Beatrice the tablet. She read it and frowned. "I don't get it."

"No worries," I said, doing my best imitation of Lunar-speak. "He'll get it."

• • •

And that's how I wound up here, all alone on Mars.

My spacesuit's recycling unit can extract oxygen from the atmosphere, there's enough humidity for my emergency kit to make liquid water, and the escape pod contains a generous supply of awful-tasting but highly nutritious food rations. I'll be able to survive until I get rescued. And I *will* get rescued.

My biggest problem is boredom. Fortunately, even though I can't talk to anyone, my comms receiver is still working. So I can watch my show — no, correction, it's Beatrice's show now. Or, as she's known on air, "Racer X": a blurry, pixelated head with a gravelly disguised voice.

I seriously love how much Jayden must be hating this.

Beatrice completed *Hawk's* orbital slingshot around Mars with fuel to spare, and the constant friction between her Lunar ways and everyone else's Earther traditions is simply delightful. She won't take any action unless she understands the rationale behind it, which means someone at mission control has to explain every one of my spacecraft procedures to her, which usually results in a wacky misunderstanding. The best part is, Beatrice wins most of the arguments in the end. And yes, I'm keeping score.

Hawk Five is now just a few hours from the carrier rendezvous. After that, Beatrice will deliver my final message to Jayden. I hope then she'll understand why it had to be me in the escape pod.

Jayden might not have sent a rescue mission back to Mars for Beatrice — some stranger he doesn't care about — but I know he's still carrying a torch for me. Besides, I'm his meal ticket. He won't let a celebrity castaway die on his watch. Not when he can use me to sell ads. And my helmet cam's been recording continuously since I landed.

My message to him was *"Space Race" 2. Kat vs. Mars."*

I'm sure we can get a full season out of this lousy place. ■

THE CONSOLE LIT UP WITH THE ESCAPE POD'S SCHEMATICS. "YOU GET HELP, THEN RESCUE ME."

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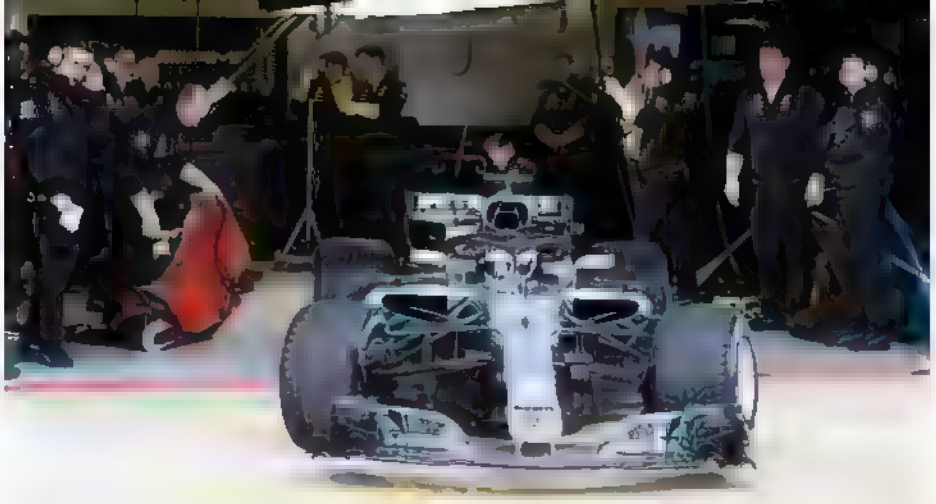
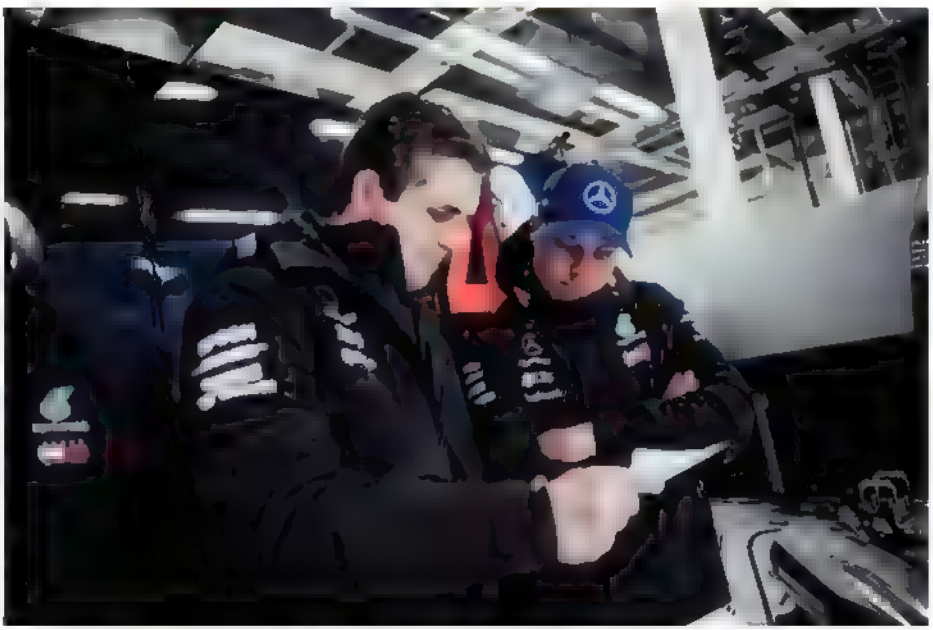


There's a storm brewing at Silverstone. In a darkened pit garage the covers have been pulled off one of the most eagerly anticipated racecars of 2018

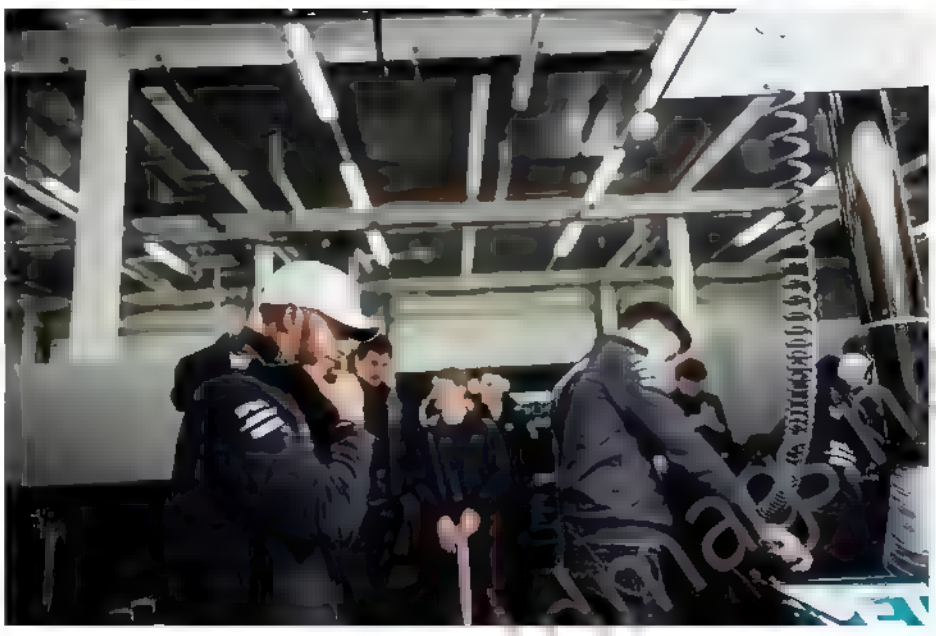
After a long winter which followed in the wake of the Mercedes-AMG Petronas Motorsport Team wrapping up a fourth consecutive constructors' championship, and a further driver's title with Lewis Hamilton at the wheel; the vehicle to carry the entire Silver Arrows family's hopes and dreams is out of the box The new car has some serious shoes to fill. 12 race wins, 15 pole positions more than any other team on the grid are just the recent highlights of a record-breaking past season. It's little wonder why then, that the factories at Brackley and Brixworth have logged thousands of hours since the flag dropped in Abu Dhabi, to pull together over 40 000 parts to create the team's most advanced Formula One car ever

Evolution is the watchword with the Mercedes-AMG F1 W09 EQ Power+ which shares a big portion of its DNA from its predecessor, and as such carries a range of subtle developments which will add up to the package

At first glance the most obvious change is the introduction of the Halo safety device, above the driver's cockpit. Further aerodynamic regulation changes extend to the banning of the 'monkey seat' - a small wing underneath the main rear wing of the car and the T-shaped wings, which featured on the rear bodywork of most cars throughout 2017



According to Lewis Hamilton, the new car comes with a warning to the competition too; *"This is better than last year's car in every aspect. It looks quite similar but inside, underneath the shell, and even the bodywork, is all refined to perform even better than it did last year. Formula One never sleeps When we aren't racing, then the teams are hard at work developing the car Days like today are incredibly proud moments for me - to be able to be part of such a great team, and see the new season's car all in one piece for the first time. It's such a work of art, and there are only two of us that get to drive it. I'm just looking forward to racing again It's crazy I've been racing forever, but it's still freaking good I still get the buzz So I'm just excited to get back into it. I could pretty much race every day "*



COURTESY OF MONSTER ENERGY

Under the low-slung silver and electric blue painted skin of the car sits a revised version of Mercedes-AMG Motorsports all-conquering powertrain. Pushing out 1000bhp (746kW). The new engine and powertrain has been rebuilt to be 40% more efficient, to conform to the new rules which state teams are only allowed to race with just three engines per driver per championship and two ERS systems.

With 21 Grand Prix scheduled for the year making 2018 the joint-longest season in F1 history there was no time to waste. Valtteri Bottas jumped in the car first to complete initial shakedown and filming laps around Silverstone's International Circuit.

"It's really amazing to know how many hours have been spent on designing and manufacturing the new car and how much effort people have put into it", explained Valtteri. "As a driver you feel really special to be able to drive this machine. I want to use all the things that I learnt last year", says Valtteri "This year is all about executing and delivering the results. For me, consistency is the key. I had some really good races, but then I had races where I was not on the level I wanted to be. I want to be on a good level on every single race weekend that's going to be the goal for me this year I definitely want to fight for the championship."

While the absolute maximum distance a team can lap at an initial shakedown is 100km, the Mercedes-AMG Petronas Motorsport Team won't have to wait long to start unleashing the true potential of their new creation. Pre-season testing has already started in Barcelona, Spain.

Wonderfeel

KAYLEIGH SWENSON

Photography by GEA IMAGES Text by NELLY MADUNA

I was born in San Antonio Texas, currently in Orange County, California I am a bigtime fitness buff, I grew up with a bodybuilder for a father and a fitness model mom, so I was surrounded by the lifestyle

I practically grew up in Gold's Gym Venice I am kind of a nerd, I love playing my Xbox and watching gory horror movies Also, I'm a fan of muscle cars, my Dodge Challenger is my baby. They call me Viking Barbie because I'm Scandinavian, tall, statuesque, and tough but glamorous

Hobbies
My hobbies and interests are working out, relaxing with a good flick, helping other people find sobriety, I love all things psychology related, and hanging out with my few close friends

Turn-ons
Loyalty, kindness, honesty, and humility

Turn-offs
Arrogant and rude people, closed mindedness, and greed

The perfect date
Working out together, ordering takeout, and curling up with a good movie

Favourite food
French fries

My biggest fear
My biggest fears are regret or losing someone I love.

One destination I'd love to visit
Ireland

You can follow me on Instagram @viking.barbie and Facebook @ vikingbarbietv for more of my adventures.

Bra:34dd
Waist:64cm
Hips: 91cm
Height:173m
Weight:61kg
Eye colour: green/grey

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DARKFEST

The world's best freeride mountain bikers make their way down to sunny South Africa to escape the cold winter months up north to build the biggest jumps mountain biking has ever seen!

By **ERIC PALMER**

This year DarkFEST has moved to an amazing new location just outside Stellenbosch on the slopes of the Simonsberg Mountain, an hour outside of Cape Town, South Africa. Three of the riders went down a month before the event to build the new course and make sure everything was working properly before the rest of the riders arrived. Sam Reynolds who is the head of the project, started out doing some road trips with friends, going back to the roots and making the videos more about the riding and fun than the more formal cinematic-style videos most people are making these days. After three years of doing the Pure Darkness trips, two of them in SA, he decided he needed to step it up a notch and started DarkFEST. He brought two master builders with him, Nico Vink and Clemens Kaudela. Nico has his own Fest stop in Belgium called Loosefest with some of the biggest jumps in the world and is such a perfectionist in the digger that when he's done there is almost no spadework needed; he has built many world-famous MTB lines. Clemens is another powerhouse builder. Not only is he amazing in a digger, he is a master with wood too. He has helped build courses for events like Nine Knights and Masters of Dirt. These three are the dream team and after scouting the location and discussing how to use the features in the landscape they got right to work.

"So, the mountain range we built the course out of this year is actually a real course builders dream, the fact that we can follow down the contours of the mountain into the big valley and steep walls that we can build the big hips and jumps out of. So it's really cool to stay within the contours of the mountain and we didn't have to stack too many big piles of dirt. You can see the hip was completely dug into the hill, it's stuff like that that really works. We tried to keep piling to a minimum to kind of keep it a bit more in with nature this time. Although it looks like we just turn up and get to dig exactly what we want, which is kind of the case, there are a few things that we had to do. We had to get the nature conservation guys in to make sure there were no special plants and stuff and there actually were a few that we had to avoid and where the watercourse is running down the middle of the valley we weren't allowed to build anything there. So, we actually had to change our layout from the original design to the course you see now for nature conservation reasons. I actually really like how the course ended up, I think it's better than what we originally designed, so that was actually pretty cool." - Sam Reynolds.

These guys were amazing to watch, if you turn your back for a few minutes you would turn around to see a huge jump where there was nothing before. After three weeks of long hours in the diggers the course was complete and ready for testing. Almost everything was perfect on the first go and they could put some final touches and compact the dirt so that they could reach the speeds they needed comfortably. They were well ahead of schedule with another week to go before the other riders arrived, so they could really make everything perfect and have a few good warm-up sessions.

The top section of the course starts with a steep drop into some tight corners and smaller jumps to get you ready for what's coming. That is followed by a road gap that drops into a long steep slope where they get up to 75km/h to be able to clear the first massive beast which is a 95ft jump! Directly after that is a 55ft jump into a corner that sets them up for a huge 90-degree hip jump where they can lean sideways and get the

CA 246-256

bikes into the craziest positions. That has a short lilypad-style landing straight into another road gap to steep landing. This got them the most speed on the course and were clocking speeds of up to 80km/h to jump the last feature, a huge step up jump with a 6m tall lip with the landing just over 10m above the top of that, so it really sent the riders to the moon

"There's not really any maths or any sort of set way to build that big, everywhere is different, because you have to use the hill that you can. It's pretty hard to say how long a jump should be, even if you have the same speed. You can't really measure the speed and tell how far you're gonna jump, because every jump is a little bit different. You just have to really go off experience and that can only come from building jumps before and building big jumps, you just gotta make sure they're mellow enough, make sure the landing is big enough and then eventually you've just gotta let the breaks off and give it a go!"

Sam

The physics involved in jumps this size is mind-blowing, the speed they hit these jumps with turns the bike into a completely different machine. The rotational force on the wheels makes turning the wheels in the air incredibly difficult, so whipping the bike sideways takes a huge lean and pull off the lip of the jump and if you manage that well the wheels will help straighten you out afterwards. The spinning also changes the air resistance, air can blow between the spokes easily at low speeds, but at 75km+/h the spokes almost turn into a solid disk, which means any side wind is catching two big sails and can throw you off your line very easily on a 100ft jump Needless to say, the guys always waited for the wind to stop almost completely before attempting these beasts. With the height, speed and distance here the impact is also very different to any other type of riding more people are used to and the suspension setups the guys use is very unique Most downhill bikes are set up to be quite soft to handle rocks and roots and suck up all the bumps, but the more your suspension moves, the more speed you lose If it is too soft the g-force you get going up the lip can bottom out the bike and cause the wheels to touch the frame or seat, which is not ideal Then there's the impact after being in the air for around 3 seconds and any soft setup would be slammed and the rider would take a lot of that force into their legs and arms, so they set theirs up extremely hard to be able to absorb more of the serious impacts and stay stiff on the run-ins to keep them up to speed. Also, just changing their

body position slightly on the run-in would change their speed. Standing up on the bike with their chest open was like an air brake and they would crouch down close to the bars with their elbows tucked in when they really needed as much speed as possible, so there are many factors they have to take into account when riding these beasts.

The rest of the riders started to make their way down to see what the boys had been up to and were pleasantly surprised by the most amazing jumps in the most beautiful location, surrounded by mountains that gave perfect 360-degree views. The riders had a week to warm-up and make friends with these massive dirt sculptures, so they didn't waste time! To ride huge jumps like this, conditions have to be perfect. Any wind can cause havoc when you're in the air as long as they are, so sessions were in the morning and evening to avoid the heat and the wind would normally drop around then. It wasn't long before we saw some mind-blowing riding and Adolf Silva and Clemens backflipped the huge 95-footer. It's so crazy, because a few years ago this would have been a world-record distance jump and now the guys are riding it and throwing tricks down over it! The step up also saw some insane riding and Nicholi Rogatkin won a best trick competition on it with a cash roll, which is a front flip 360. Crazy to see such technical tricks on such huge jumps!

By the end of the week the guys were ready for the crowds to roll in, which they did. On the public day the morning was perfect after some rain the night before, so the guys got to riding nice and early and treated the fans to some of the crazy tricks they'd been working on all week. Unfortunately the wind picked up in the late morning and got too dangerous to ride in. Some of the riders carried on jumping the step up, it was in a different direction to the rest of the jumps and a bit more sheltered, so they could keep the show going a bit longer. The mid-day heat picked up, so everyone took a lunch break and waited for the evening session. The wind had other plans though and didn't drop as is had before, so the evening session was called off, but this is the nature of this type of event. Sometimes you're lucky, sometimes not. That's what makes the sessions so special when everything comes together. Despite the afternoon being called off the crowd was still amazed with what they saw and left with the hugest smiles knowing they'd seen something not many people get to witness with their own eyes.

"It's awesome how big DarkFEST has gone this year, we've reached out to more

Mountainbike

mainstream media, like "People Are Awesome" and stuff like that, they liked it and put some videos up, which I think can only be good for freeriding and mountain biking in general. I guess it's because of the high speeds and the big jumps, maybe whereas slopestyle is getting a little hard to understand with an extra barspin or a tail whip in there, people can't really understand that. I think you can understand backflipping a 100-foot jump, so I think that's why it's gone pretty. As long as people like it, we're gonna keep building it". – Sam.

DarkFEST 2018 has been an amazing success! Sam and his team put on an amazing show and already can't wait to come back and add to the line and try more tricks over these beasts!

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